

LAMA YESHE



*The* ENLIGHTENED  
EXPERIENCE

COLLECTED TEACHINGS, VOLUME 2

Edited by Nicholas Ribush

Compiled by Sandra Smith

LAMA YESHE WISDOM ARCHIVE

# ***THE ENLIGHTENED EXPERIENCE***

Collected Teachings, Volume 2

**Lama Yeshe**

*Edited by Nicholas Ribush*

*Compiled by Sandra Smith*



*May whoever sees, touches, reads, remembers, or talks or thinks about this book never be reborn in unfortunate circumstances, receive only rebirths in situations conducive to the perfect practice of Dharma, meet only perfectly qualified spiritual guides, quickly develop bodhicitta and immediately attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.*

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Cover image: Lama Yeshe wearing a ceremonial crown of the five dhyani buddhas for the Tara statue procession, Kopan Monastery, Nepal, 1976

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# *LAMA YESHE WISDOM ARCHIVE*

*Bringing you the teachings of Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche*



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## *Preface*



*Lama Yeshe offering mandala. Manjushri Institute, England, 1977.*

In Volume 2 of this series of collected teachings, Lama Yeshe discusses a range of topics including refuge, impermanence, the death process, karma and delusion. Lama teaches on emptiness in a practical and experiential way and advises how to develop the profound wisdom and method of the Buddha. Volume 2 includes several excerpts from a commentary on the tantric deity yoga practice of Manjushri and a poignant last letter to his close friend Geshe Jampa Wangdu, written when Lama was seriously ill.



These teachings have been published previously on the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive website and in other publications including *Mandala* magazine. The purpose of this book is to gather the teachings into one central resource. Most of the teachings are edited by Nicholas Ribush, however, *Contacting the Bodhgaya Within* was edited by Hermes Brandt and the editor of *Anger and the Enemy* is not known.

The archive numbers for the teachings are: 495, 072, 092, 443, 108, 350, 224, 159, 297, 005, 123, 043 and 472. To access the teachings online, go to [LamaYeshe.com](http://LamaYeshe.com) and search for the archive number using the [Search the Archive Database](#) link on the home page. A comprehensive [glossary of Buddhist terms](#) in this book can also be found on the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive website.

The collection is drawn from teachings given by Lama Thubten Yeshe in the 1970s and 1980s, when he travelled the world along with Lama Zopa Rinpoche and taught extensively. Lama Zopa Rinpoche has described how students were inspired by Lama's teachings. "People would say that when they went back home they felt as if their feet were not touching the ground and they had a feeling of peace and happiness in their heart," Rinpoche said.

Lama Yeshe was a pioneer in bringing the Dharma to Westerners and the teachings in this book demonstrate his understanding of the Western psyche and his ability to express profound truths in simple terms. He consistently encourages students to recognize and develop their limitless potential, and his dynamic teaching style means that his teachings are as relevant and accessible today as when first taught.

Sandra Smith  
August 2019



*Lama Yeshe, Kopan Monastery, Nepal, 1977.*

## ***Why We Need a Guru***

*From a teaching at Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa, Pomaia, Italy, September 1977.*

Why do we need a guru? Because in order to cure our diseased minds, we need the help of someone who knows how to do it. Since it is extremely difficult to understand how the mind works, we need the guidance of an expert in this area.

Furthermore, gaining liberation, or inner freedom, is not an easy thing. Everything we have ever said or done on this trip we call life has had its origin in the mind, and in the same way, the entire path to liberation and enlightenment depends on the mind.

However, if we think of all our life's experiences, how convinced are we that they have all come from the mind? In order to really understand how this is true, we need someone with the right kind of knowledge to explain it to us. In other words, we need a guru.

If we just think about this in a superficial way, we'll probably say to ourselves, "I know what I want; I know what my life's about." We might think we know, but we really don't. For example, we think environmental pollution comes from industry, but where does industry come from? It's a creation of the human mind. In the same way, all the world's confusion, from that of societies to that of the individual, is mind-created. If people could simply imbue their minds with peaceful tranquility and loving kindness, none of the world problems we see around us would arise.

In order to develop peaceful tranquility of mind, we have to employ a method that brings that result. Since we don't know what such methods are or how to put them into practice, we need an experienced teacher to show us that reality.

We can say that there are two types of guru—relative and absolute. The absolute guru is the all-knowing wisdom that is one with bliss; that wisdom is the absolute guru. In order to realize this wisdom within ourselves, we need a relative guru to show us how.

Therefore, guru doesn't necessarily mean something physical, but beginners, who don't possess much inner knowledge, definitely need a physical guru. After some time, when we have enough confidence and self-knowledge to travel the path to enlightenment alone, we don't need to always be in the presence of our relative guru, but until that time, we're like yo-yos. When we're around our guru, our mind is subdued, but as soon as we're a mile or two away, our mind goes completely berserk. That shows how we are.

Putting it another way, the guru is the antidote to the confused mind—as long as he's the right guru. A guru who's a bad influence and leads us to more confusion and restlessness is a false guru; not a guru at all.





*Lama Yeshe at the 11th Meditation course, Kopan Monastery, Nepal, 1978.*

### ***Refuge is a State of Mind***

*From a teaching given at a refuge ceremony at Chenrezig Institute, Eudlo, Australia, on September 12, 1976.*

When you take refuge in Buddhadharma, the important point is that you have recognized your own profound potential, and from the beginning can see that, “I can do something, I can take the responsibility of liberating myself.” This is different from the attitude we

normally have: “I’m hopeless, I’m hopeless; maybe God, maybe Buddha, maybe Lama can do something for me.” This sort of human attitude is wrong. From the Buddhist point of view it is wrong to think, “I’m hopeless, Buddha can do something for me.” That attitude is wrong because it’s not true. By believing that you are hopeless you have already decided that you are nothing, you have already put a limit on your profound quality. The important thing in taking refuge is to have the understanding that you can do something to solve the problem of everyday life by relying, with confidence and trust, on the Buddha’s wisdom—or you can also call it your own activated wisdom—to liberate you from confusion and suffering. So it is really worthwhile. The real significance of taking refuge in Dharma wisdom is that it is the entrance to the path to enlightenment.

That is why, traditionally, every day people in Buddhist countries take refuge to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. But Western people don’t need to copy this, going to the temple every day, taking refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha without concentration. We don’t need to follow the customs of those countries. What we need to do is to recognize what brings us a liberated joyful life. Instead of relying on, taking refuge in chocolate and apples and biscuits and toys, instead of taking refuge in the beach, in movies or in popcorn, we should understand in our hearts that the liberated joyful life does not depend on those conditions, those worldly phenomena.

The lamrim shows exactly, logically, scientifically that human happiness and joy do not depend on material conditions. You should understand clean clear and determine that that is reality. Then you will not be upset by not getting presents and chocolates, or by people not paying attention to you. Otherwise, small things always upset you and small things make you dissatisfied. The over-extreme expectation of getting things from the external world makes problems. So taking refuge in Buddhadharma is really worthwhile.

And some people feel that by taking refuge, “I have to remember my Lama’s nose, my Lama’s head.” That is not necessary. When you take refuge it is not necessary for you always to remember your Lama’s nose. Or, “Every day I have to go to the temple,” or, “Every day I have to say Buddha Buddha, Dharma Dharma, Sangha Sangha, Buddha Buddha, Dharma Dharma, Sangha Sangha—if I forget to say those words, I am completely guilty, I am not acting correctly for one who has taken refuge.” It is not that way, that is a misunderstanding. We are not trying to have the Western mind copy the aspect of Buddhist culture. Westerners should understand that taking refuge is a state of mind. It doesn’t matter whether you are in a plane, in the subway, in a train, in a bathroom or wherever—somehow, you recognize your buddha potential and rely on that inner wisdom to stop the problems of everyday life, and you understand that you can deal with these through meditation, through intellectual thinking, or through enacting the six paramitas. From my point of view that kind of thing is good enough, and if you are really taking refuge you don’t even need to say one word “Buddha.”

And also, ordinarily, when you are depressed you can ask Buddha for help. By recognizing Buddha’s unlimited wisdom and universal compassion it helps psychologically. When you remember his universal compassion, when you think of his universal wisdom, those objects, somehow on your side also you open up a little bit. In other words, you just think about the reality of the whole world, look at what’s going on in the whole world: what’s going on in Africa? what’s going on in America? what’s going on in India? what’s going on? By just

thinking about all the different conditions of human existence, you find, “Somehow, I’m not too bad, I’m not too bad.” So that’s the way of opening up, that’s what being open means. When your mind has opened to such a profound universal object, it has space. It is the same thing when you remember Buddha’s unlimited compassion, unlimited wisdom and unlimited power. Thus it is easy to see that taking refuge is not something that you are just relying on words.

Even if you have kind of enormous pleasure, kind of everything coming together, you can’t believe it: “How is it I have so much pleasure? I have this, I have this, I have this; I don’t know how, what kind of fortune I have, everything is coming together for me.” At the same time, instead of becoming concrete inside, concrete and grasping onto this, you think, “Hmm, all this is coming together so easily, yeah, but it’s good that my happiness and pleasure do not depend on this.” [Lama showing material object.] You use your wisdom. For example, perhaps you have some ambition, “I want this, I want this, I want this, I want this, I want this.” So even if somehow everything you wanted comes, whatever you thought of, all materials come together, still you are not too excited: “Well, it is true, it is there, everything has come together, it seems that I can enjoy myself. Hmm, still I hope that I can feel satisfied and together without all these things too, that my satisfaction does not depend on all this.” Thus Dharma wisdom not only liberates you when you are miserable, it also liberates you when you have tremendous pleasure.

We always need Dharma wisdom. Even when you have great pleasure you need wisdom to really make your mind stable. Normally the Western mind is up and down, up and down, up and down, twenty-four hours a day up and down—maybe up and down a hundred times a day. Westerners believe that these outside things are solid, “That makes me happy. This morning I am happy, you say that I am bad so now I feel terrible.” This is no good, no good. This up and down comes from not recognizing the inner wisdom that can be relied on and not recognizing the inner ability to liberate oneself. I think you people understand; I don’t need to talk so much about this. Sometimes you can explain refuge in so many ways, I think you understand.

I think in the West, so many people are suffering incredibly; you don’t realize. Especially, you are young people, you can do so many things, can’t you? Now, at the moment, you can do so many things—you can travel, you can meet interesting people, you can do this, you can do that, you can do this. But when you are old you can’t do things any more. Automatically, when you merely think about those miserable conditions, you become so afraid. However, now you are training your mind to understand the profound, so when you become older I think that at that time you will have a better life.

So you understand what Buddha means. But still, it is good, when you have taken refuge, to put a Buddha image in your room, or to make a small shrine room. Then, when you just look at your Buddha image you can remember his knowledge. And also Buddha Shakyamuni’s history: how many times did he give his body for mother sentient beings? Sometimes he gave his eye for sentient beings, there are many different reasons, sometimes he gave his leg, sometimes he gave his life completely. At other times he was a monk and he had to marry some lady, so he gave his life completely for that woman. Sometimes he gave his body to the tigers. All kinds of things like these he did, unbelievable things, cutting the meat from his leg and offering it to mother sentient beings. We can’t do these things now.



Actually, people who have studied the Madhyamaka might remember the bodhisattva who cut off his limb, piece by piece, and with respect offered it to others. Instead of his having pain, he was blissful, completely blissful. This is a good example for us. It is not that he didn't have the conditions of pain; the condition of his body is a painful situation, it is made for pain. But he had the key of mind control, and through his psychic power, the power of his consciousness, instead of pain he felt bliss.

Normally my Guru, His Holiness Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche, uses this example when he gives teachings. In Tibet we have a lot of beggars; in one day perhaps ten beggars come before you and say, "Hello, we need something." Most of the time what we give is *tsampa*, the Tibetan national food is tsampa. It's a kind of muesli, sort of ground roasted barley. Some people give just a little and other people give quite a lot, it depends. So he says, when somebody knocks on your door to ask for a little tsampa, you become irritated, irritated. But when somebody asks a bodhisattva to give a piece of his body, he is completely blissful. The bodhisattva understands that this person is helping: "This man is helping me to complete my paramita of charity," so he is completely blissful. That is his attitude. When somebody comes here asking for us to give something, instead of having the attitude of wanting to give, we become irritated and angry. But the bodhisattva who has really trained his mind in such a way is blissful: "Because this person is asking me, I can do something. This beggar is helping me to develop my path to enlightenment," so cutting off his flesh he is completely blissful. Those are good examples and not just stories. Also, when Jesus was crucified, he manifested ordinary suffering, showed a horrible appearance, but actually he must have been totally blissful, giving his body in order to take the negativities of mother sentient beings. Although outwardly he appeared suffering, he must have been blissful.

You can see that inner progression is so profound, so profound. Another good example in the West is the Christian missionary. It is good, those Christian people, they take refuge in God, somehow they understand that God is responsible for everything and so they go to Africa or some other terrible place. They go to serve other people. They are the same as us—do you think they don't like muesli? They like muesli, they like chocolate, they like cake, but somehow they give up that situation and because of God go to that other place and accept the suffering in order to help those poor people. I feel they are wonderful; somehow they have inside themselves the ability to cope, by taking refuge in God. I think, they are profound.

And we Buddhist people, even though we know that if we do one hour's meditation in the morning the whole day is completely blissful, each of us has the experience, we are still lazy, aren't we? Even though we know clean clear, through experience not only words, that if we have good meditation in the morning the rest of the day goes very easily, sometimes we degenerate, we don't meditate. We forget things. Maybe when you come here to Chenrezig Institute you meditate, but when you go to Melbourne or Sydney it is less and less, and when you reach the center of Melbourne, then all these things have finished. The only thing left is ice cream. I'm joking. Anyway, it is good, we should understand that there are examples in the West also, the Christian people. There are some very sincere people and they get something, they get something. So it is important that we learn to meditate and have some experience, and then continuously develop.

Actually, meditation is taking refuge. Meditation *is* your taking refuge, because inside you have the attitude, “If I meditate I can liberate myself.” By using Buddhist wisdom and Buddhist method. So it is really worthwhile. Otherwise, I myself feel that without recognizing the profound inner ability and having confidence in and relying on that, human beings are useless. Especially in the West, it is very dangerous—we dedicate our entire life to the pursuit of happiness but the result is misery, misery. That’s the story of our lives, isn’t it? So you understand, it is really worthwhile. Especially old students should try to set a good example for new students. The bodhicitta attitude is to help other sentient beings, and the Buddhist way is by just being a good example yourself, that is good enough. Not just words, just be a good example, give energy to new people. That is the way in which you help. Otherwise, perhaps you have some fantastic intellectual understanding, but if by your behavior you set a bad example it can’t help, you can’t help other sentient beings.

Anyway, I have no intention to talk too much, but if you have any questions before taking refuge please ask them. It is good to make it clean clear. The subject of refuge is so vast that we can never completely cover it for you, so if you have any questions please ask.



*Lama Yeshe, Zurich, Switzerland, 1978. Photo by Fred von Allmen.*

*Q:* What is the difference between Jesus and Buddha?

*Lama:* According to their appearance in this earth, each of them is relatively different but absolutely the same thing. Basically, Jesus taught by his actions of compassion and love—perhaps the Western world needed to be taught that way. When Buddha Shakyamuni came, he taught with his profound speech, through his actions showed his enlightened realizations, and showed the function of his omniscient wisdom.

*Q:* If the Buddha represents your higher self and universal wisdom and compassion, does that mean that if you are a woman you can imagine the Buddha as being female?

*Lama:* Yes, of course. Definitely, yes. It is very important to understand that even if you are a female, the profound buddha potential is the same as in men, even though relatively the structure of our bodies is different. This is too temporal, relative, but when one is controlled, what is the difference? Like Tara, you can see the painting of that female aspect of Buddha. And also, there is no distinction between men and women in that it takes one longer to discover enlightenment and a shorter time for the other. It depends completely upon the development of the individual. In tantric yoga we have the explanation that even in this life, starting from knowing nothing of the inner reality, one can reach enlightenment, equal with Shakyamuni Buddha—both men and women have equal ability to do this.

*Q:* I would like you to tell us a little about the benefits of taking refuge.

*Lama:* The benefits of taking refuge? The benefit of taking refuge is that you liberate yourself, as I said before. Taking refuge in Buddha and Dharma means—first of all, what is Dharma? Dharma is wisdom, the clean-clear sharp wisdom, seeing clearly, is the Dharma. And taking refuge means you become Dharma, you become the Dharma wisdom light. Perhaps at first, at the beginning, you are a small candle light, but by meditating each day the small candle light is activated and becomes bigger, bigger, bigger, bigger—and then your Dharma wisdom is transformed into the omniscient wisdom, totality wisdom. And in the same way, by taking refuge and so on, you increase your compassionate loving-kindness attitude. When you increase your loving-kindness actions you become liberated from the self-cherishing thought, don't you? Then you have no conflict with other human beings. Even if other people are making some conflict for you, instead of getting angry you have compassion, "What can I do?" So you have control. You don't have to control yourself like this [Lama squeezing himself up into a tight ball]: "I am controlled, I am controlled." Just control, just control, it doesn't need any effort. [Lama showing relaxed aspect]

At first, it's true, we need a lot of effort, sort of meditation and effort; but after some time you don't need this—just your being is meditation, just being *is* liberated, just being *is* loving kindness, just being *is* bodhisattva, bodhicitta. It is difficult at the beginning, but also I cannot say "You are a beginner, therefore you should squeeze yourself," Perhaps you are more advanced than I am, who knows? We never know—the thing is, in Buddhism we don't judge, we cannot judge. For example, I cannot say "I am the wisdom man, your teacher—you have to learn from me." No, I cannot; I can learn from you too; we are helping each other. Even though we are not yet enlightened, each of us has different aspects of wisdom more developed—so you have certain wisdom better than mine and I can learn from you too.



*Q:* When you take refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, you are taking refuge in the higher pure clean-clear self. Since the guru is the embodiment of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, is the guru like your clean-clear self also?

*Lama:* That's right. Yes. If you understand it in such an absolute way, it is like in Christianity we have one God. Similarly, the guru is the Buddha, the guru is the Dharma, the guru is the Sangha—you can understand it in that way too. Good.

*Q:* Could you talk a bit more about refuge in the Sangha?

*Lama:* OK. Good. There are two levels of Sangha: relative Sangha and absolute Sangha. We are all relative Sangha. I am learning from you people, you are helping. If I have some understanding, if I am receptive, I learn from you people. You people also give me energy. Actually we give each other energy. Let me make an example. I have the attitude that when I give my students Dorje Sempa (Skt: Vajrasattva) initiation they have to retreat for three months, do a strict retreat for three months. And if they do a group retreat they are almost always successful. But some people say, "Lama, I want to retreat by myself, alone; please let me." I say, "Alright, alright." You know—what can I say? Baby cries, wants—what can I say? It is not my way to say, to insist that, "You have to do it with the group." Then they would freak out, wouldn't they? Anyway, I know they would freak out and instead of becoming positive would turn out negative. So I have to say, "Yes, yes, yes." Then I watch with my big eyes, I watch what they are going to do. The result is always disaster; they never finish a good retreat. They always break down and end up maybe neurotic, saying, "Not possible, I get much *lung*," and these things. It's obvious, I understand.

But retreating with a group is always helpful. Let's say today I'm lower, I'm a little bit depressed. My negative mind is questioning, "Ooh, why is Dorje Sempa, I don't understand?" Actually, the negative mind doesn't want to understand, so, "Why, we are European people, all these Tibetan trips, Dorje Sempa and *yab* and *yum*, all these things make me really ... instead of staying here and meditating I want to meet my girlfriend/boyfriend." Anyway, all these ridiculous kinds of minds come out. So then you tell your friend, "I have this happening, I don't understand." Then your friend, who is a bit strong, says, "Wait a minute, maybe you think this way. What, what." Actually he is really the one who brings me up and helps me get myself together. So then I can control my negative mind a little bit. Actually, we are learning from each other, kind of recycling each other, helping. Really, human beings are so kind, incredible. Since the time we were born up to now sentient beings have been the source of life—our growth and everything. So you can understand the idea of kindness of mother sentient beings, you can see.

So we are the Sangha: you are my Sangha and I am your Sangha too. We are all Sangha for each other, we help each other. What is the reason, why do we need this? The need is simple. If you stay at some place where you are surrounded by people drinking wine, drinking wine every day, intoxicated every night and having all kinds of activities going on, if you stay there maybe one year, every day they are giving you teachings: "Drinking wine is very nice, it brings your spirits up; whenever you are lonely, whenever you are depressed, drink wine." "Maybe, yes, today I don't feel so good, perhaps I'll have a drink today, check it out." Then you feel, to some extent, for a short time, it helps. For a short time you can ignore the problem; you become sort of unconscious. However, I know, most of our students, when

they go back to their own homes, their old samsaric homes, they become a complete disaster. One day they say, “Oh, last night I talked with my friend, or my mother too late, I can’t do meditation.” So they sleep too late in the morning and when they get up it is already about lunchtime, so too late for meditation. Then the next evening, the same old story, “I have to go to a party.” Two days no meditation. “Oh, really ....” That is the samsaric environment—not enough Sangha vibration. So we are sick people who cannot stand by ourselves. We need some kind of stick or other help to stand. We are not yet liberated so we do need the Sangha to help. We definitely need. For that reason, relative Sangha, we are all Sangha.

Absolute Sangha, we need better Sangha actually, who understand such inner absolute quality of reality, non-duality. That is the real Sangha. We are relative Sangha but we are not perfect Sangha. We can still help each other but not in the profound way, not until we discover non-duality. So we desperately need the help of Sangha.

Also, you can see, you come here for a meditation course, you know it’s going to be difficult. Most of you students know it’s going to be difficult. “I’m sure my knees are going to hurt, and especially listening for two or three hours to this monk pumping, pumping, pumping, pumping.” A situation in which you have never been before. And then sitting for six hours every day. “Six hours sitting?”—even you can’t believe that yourself, “I could not believe it.” I’m sure you could not believe it yourself. It’s true, this is the human beauty, the beauty of the human quality; you could not believe it, I tell you. You cannot judge yourself, “I can do, I cannot do.” The human being can do unbelievable things. Let’s say we talk about Milarepa—it seems to us that he is outrageous, doesn’t it? But if we want we can do exactly the same as Milarepa did. You see, you can never make any limitation on the human potential, it is so profound.

So you can see that here we put everybody’s energy together. I’m sure that Scott sometimes makes you irritated—he’s the police, the Chenrezig police, so sometimes he makes you irritated. Doesn’t he say to you, “Please come to meditation, please, if you don’t come it’s not so nice.” “Why, leave me alone. I want to be free from you, I don’t want your samsara,” you say. Anyway, you understand. The thing is that when we meditate, when it’s meditation time, somehow we make it a little bit exclusive. So I tell them to ask people who don’t come to please come, tell them to use their wisdom and request sort of lightly, “Please you come, these people need the help of your energy.” I believe that too—so everybody is together and give energy to each other. You could not believe it. I mean, some young guy is sitting in front of you very sincerely. You’re an old man like me, feeling terrible, your mind is going sort of, “Eerh,” so you learn from him, “I have to do something better.” As soon as you have decided that you want to do better you are beginning to be better. But if you say at the beginning, “I’m hopeless, I don’t care, I’m jealous of these people,” then you become worse. So we do need Sangha, we do need Sangha help. I tell you. I think that most of our Western Dharma practitioners’ problem is that when they go back to their own samsaric nest there is no support, spiritually no support. Everything is delusion, delusion, delusion. I mean it is obvious, we take all that garbage into our minds so then it becomes difficult for us.

Until you reach a certain level, you do need that help. If you discover the absolute truth, or the first bodhisattva bhumi, then you don’t need any support. Absolutely, you don’t need any external support. Then you can go anywhere—you can go to Sydney, you can go to

Melbourne—you can liberate yourself. Also, many times students come to liberate people, but instead of their liberating other people, the other people liberate them—to samsara. So even I'm afraid that if I were to stay a long time in the West, perhaps Western people would liberate me into samsara! And they would give me the chocolate initiation! I'm joking, incredibly.

*Q:* When we meditate, is there any structure that we should follow to remind us of the refuge that we have taken?

*Lama:* Normally what we do before meditation when we take refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha is to recognize or recall the profound wisdom, profound compassion and profound power of the Buddha. We recognize that through having developed these three, that totality is Buddha. There is no more significance than that. That is the Buddha. So if I actualize, I can develop the totality of these three within myself. Not only me, but all universal living beings. So with this profound remembrance and compassion for all mother sentient beings, you go into the meditation. That is good enough. That is the structure of entering meditation by taking refuge. Thank you, good question. Or the formal way of taking refuge is that you visualize your father on your right side, your mother on your left, all people who irritate you in front and the people to whom you are greatly attached, who you love, behind, and all universal living beings surrounding you. Then you take refuge in the Buddha, as we do in the lamrim. So when you take refuge you make everybody take refuge together. Then from the crown of the Buddha's head different colored light radiates to each sentient being, purifying their impure bodies, speech and mind, and transforming them into liberated beings. That way of taking refuge is also very good. And after that the Buddha dissolves into you. Thus you identify yourself with the totality of the Buddha's nature, you become completely of the nature of the Buddha rather than feeling hopeless. This is very helpful psychologically to eliminate the low opinion and limited view of yourself. So the first one is sort of instinctive taking refuge, and the second is the formal way of taking refuge.

*Q:* Is it preferable to meditate at the same time every day? Before you only spoke about meditation in the morning, but could you do it at night?

*Lama:* Yes, sure, sure, you can do it. But what is important about the morning is that it is the beginning of the day. When you get up in the morning you have to face the day, you are beginning your activity to enter that day of life. So it is good to think, "Well, fortunately, today I'm alive. I could have died last night." You don't want to think that you might have died last night. If you had died last night what would have happened to you? Would you be really upset? Maybe if you died last night you would be very upset today! I'm joking. Well, if you died last night then today there would be no upset being ... actually, your question is a very good question. In the Western lifestyle, it is sometimes difficult to have time to meditate in the morning. You can never predict what life is like, so at least for a short time you should think, "Today I have a human life, it is so worthwhile. I am so happy to be alive. So what I should do today is to be as happy as possible myself, control my situation, and help as much as possible those surrounding me." You just have to think that way for a short time, it is very powerful. If you develop that determination in the morning, even if during the day somebody tries to irritate you, you still have space. And also, meditation is not necessarily sitting like this. You can meditate while you are having your morning shower or

while you are traveling by car or bus. Meditation is just thinking the words or remembering the Dharma subject, that's all.

Now we are going to take refuge, but our approach is a little different to the one I have just explained. This time you visualize the object from whom you are taking refuge in front of you. You are taking refuge from Lama, and the higher beings—buddhas and bodhisattvas—of the ten directions. In front of them you promise or determine that, “From now until the end of my life, until I reach enlightenment”—make such a powerful kind of determination—“I take refuge in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, for my inner wisdom to progress. They are what really elevate or lead me to liberation. I have discovered that the light of wisdom is the only vehicle to liberate myself from confusion, suffering and ego conflict. So now, instead of my taking refuge in chocolate and ice cream, I will really inwardly trust, inwardly completely rely on the object of Buddha, Dharma wisdom and profound Sangha. Especially to transform myself into Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.” So you recognize their profound qualities.

“Also, I am really fortunate that I don't have the concrete conception that always takes refuge by relying on material objects. If I had that kind of belief it would be extremely disastrous; it would be completely stupid—I would waste my life, making it worthless, absolutely useless. If I spent my life believing that ice cream is my resource of happiness I am totally stupid. How could I be happy in this life let alone the next, creating such unbelievable karma. Somehow, I am really fortunate that I can understand intellectually really clean clear, that if I develop my Dharma wisdom, through becoming relative Sangha I can transform myself into absolute Sangha and can equal the realizations of Guru Shakyamuni. It is unbelievable. This is the right approach, it doesn't matter what kind of life I am involved in—movie star life, nightclub life, it doesn't matter what kind of life; it doesn't matter to which class I belong, I am never going to give up this profound understanding. This is the most profound and precious thing, beyond compare with any kind of Western material pleasure—this awakening totality life of Dharma wisdom is beyond compare. The Dharma is the way to eternal bliss, eternal happiness, enlightenment.”

So determine, “Not only myself.” You visualize also on your right side your father, on your left your mother, “They are so kind, even though sometimes they are mean, telling me that I am not good enough, actually, in their way they want the best thing for me. Even though my father and mother are ignorant, they want me to become a film star or a millionaire, this kind of thing. They mean well, I cannot blame them. In fact they want me to be happy and free from miserable situations. Also, it is through their kindness that I have come in contact with Dharma wisdom, the profound wisdom and method of the Buddha, I am grateful to my mother and father for this fortune. They are very kind.” Then in front of you, you visualize your enemy. Of course, normally, we don't have enemies, but whoever has irritated you in your life, you can put there. And behind you, you put all the objects to which you are attached, at which you grasp. And then visualize all universal living beings surrounding you. And you are their leader in taking refuge, leading them to refuge. So think with much compassion, “I and all these surrounding universal beings have been confused and uncontrolled for countless lives, and through wrong conception have been taking refuge in material atoms, a completely wrong attitude. Who has really eliminated all this wrong attitude that leads to misery and dissatisfaction are the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Buddha can read our mind, sees whatever we need, and shows the method and wisdom to liberate each

of us. The real, profound liberator is Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, so from now until I have completely transformed myself and unified with the Triple Gem, I take refuge.”

The object is not only Lama, but all buddhas, bodhisattvas and arhats of the ten directions. So you determine this in front of them. From the crown of each of them white light radiates and comes into your crown; from their throats red light radiates into your throat; and from their hearts blue light radiates into your heart. The white purifies the impurity of thoughts and the blocked, uncondusive nervous system so that the body can be controlled, the red light purifies the uncontrolled energy of speech, and the blue light purifies the wrong conceptions and fanatical wrong views. At the same time you repeat this ....

[Lama performs the refuge ceremony.]

Thank you. It is good that each time you are meditating, taking refuge, or even if you are not meditating, just remember the experience of clarity and contemplate on that. Even if you are eating, contemplate on that clean-clear experience. That’s good enough.



## *That's the Lamrim!*

*The next two excerpts are from a teaching at the tenth Kopan meditation course, Kathmandu, Nepal, November 1977.*



*Lama Yeshe, Kopan Monastery, Nepal, 1979.*

## Emotional Ambition

The whole question is, what makes us happy? What kind of action does not bring an undesirable result? What do we have to do to be happy? That's what we have to investigate clean clear.

Our usual situation is that we're either kind of happy, somewhat unhappy or in between. None of these three states is any good. Emotional happiness, the sort we experience when we go out nightclubbing or something, the sort that normally makes us say, "Now I'm happy," is not happiness. It's what we might feel when we act out of grasping attachment and it causes us to generate more grasping: "I want more, I want more." Each time we experience this kind of happiness and cling to it we're laying down more and more thick imprints on our mind, imprints that will cause us to keep on grasping at unreal happiness without end.

For example, many of you left a comfortable life to come to this course, where the conditions are relatively unpleasant. You're unhappy with the austere situation here because you've brought with you an idea of how things should be: the rooms should be very clean; the bathrooms at least should be up to a certain standard. You have a fixed idea of what constitutes pleasure based on your life in the West: "Things should be like this; my life should go this way." But you can never make predictions about life; it is constantly changing and you're always having to experience different states.

Anyway, the reason you're uncomfortable or even miserable here in Nepal is because of the reactions of your grasping mind. The Nepalis don't mind. They're happy. They're also human beings. Their bathrooms are worse than ours. But our dualistic mind, the mind that's always making comparisons, "I'm this, so I can't deal with that," creates all this conflict. So of course we're not happy.

The thing is, therefore, that whatever we think is happiness is actually the cause of misery. It might be difficult to accept that fact but it's a profound truth. If you check deeply you will see that this is correct. And in many cases what drives this is ambition, the emotional ambition that is so prevalent in Western culture. For some reason, your society, culture, life, background, whatever it is, makes everybody incredibly tense. It's emotional ambition. It makes you unstable. This ambitious mind is psychologically sick.

How sick? It makes you very self-sensitive. Insignificant things make you happy. Somebody gives you one small chocolate and you feel, "Oh, I'm so happy with this chocolate." Then when that person doesn't give you a chocolate you get miserable and unhappy. It's not the chocolate or absence of chocolate doing this, it's your mind.

Therefore you need meditation to understand the tricks your mind plays on you. It is your mind, not your body. Whenever you experience samsaric pleasure, not knowing its reality, you have the expectation that it will last, that it will continue, that you'll have more pleasure. Which is not possible. It's not made that way. It's not in its nature to last. But you can see how this attitude produces more attachment. And you can see how it makes you unhappy: you want it to last but it finishes. That's obvious; I don't need to explain that.

Whenever you're unhappy, anger and hatred tend to arise. You can see this with people who contract some kind of physical illness. They become very sensitive and are easily prone to anger. Before they got sick they were OK, but when they're ill you can't even say anything to them. They're so tense and easily upset. It's the underlying unhappiness that causes this. There's an expectation of feeling good all the time, so when they get sick, people get unhappy and their dislike is converted to hatred. "I dislike my disease; I dislike what's happening to me." This dislike generates hatred. So when even family and dear friends approach, that dislike or hatred is projected onto them. It's incredible, the trips the mind takes.

Once when I was in the refugee camp I had a stomach ache and the idea came into my head that I needed some *thugpa* [Tibetan noodle soup]. So I told my brother to bring me some *thugpa* but he brought something else. I had this incredibly fixed idea, this grasping mind, that I had to have *thugpa*, so when he came back without it I was really unhappy. It was unbelievable—I couldn't believe myself! I was so ridiculous. This is what sickness can do to you. You become hypersensitive and ready to dislike anything, so even a small thing can make you completely freak out.

The point is, the nature of dissatisfaction is hatred.

You can see the same thing in interpersonal relationships. When you don't get satisfaction from somebody you can easily dislike or even hate that person.

So I mentioned before our three usual states of being. When we're in between—neither happy nor miserable—that's not good either, because even though we might not be either grasping at happiness with attachment or generating hatred toward someone or something, we'll still be unaware of reality; we'll just be in a state of dull ignorance.

Check up your own life. When you're experiencing some kind of temporal happiness or sentimental pleasure, what does your mind want? Your mind wants it to last, to go on and on, to get even better, to increase. Of course, it's not in the nature of temporal pleasure to last forever or even a long time, but if you have the concrete expectation that it will do so you will end up feeling hopeless and frustrated.

If you understand such life situations, the interactions between mind and life, you can easily see how life itself is, in general, uncomfortable and agitated. It's not because of your body, it's because of your uncontrolled, dissatisfied mind. That's what makes you miserable. So, this is how life goes—round and round, in a kind of circle. Life itself is cyclic existence, *samsara*.

## That's the Lamrim!

Those who understand the entire evolution of samsara see that it's ignorance that makes people dedicate their whole lives, beginning to end, to the pursuit of temporal pleasure without getting bored. Therefore there's a need for meditation, not only for religious people but also for those who are not religious. Liberation is not only for religious people. If you understand your own situation, your own lifestyle, even if you're non-religious you can see your own confusion, your own dissatisfaction; you can see that what you consider to be happiness, that which causes attachment to arise, doesn't truly give you pleasure. You can also see how your experiences of misery make it easy to get angry and your neutral experiences make you ignorant and dull.

This is samsara. Your entire life becomes samsara. It's not just that you're alive, therefore you're in samsara. No. It's linked to your ignorant, grasping, dull attitude. That's what makes your life samsara. And as its name, cyclic existence, suggests, it's a circle and you keep going around and around without end.

Meditation can release you from all this repeated, repeated, repeated, emotional self-sensitivity. With release your life becomes more stable; you have fewer expectations because you understand the nature of things—that the pleasure they give is limited. If I expect my clothes to give me everlasting pleasure I'm going to be disappointed.

In the same way, human beings cannot give each other everlasting pleasure; a Himalayan gorilla monk like me cannot give you everlasting pleasure. Your everlasting pleasure is your responsibility. And it's the same thing with all the other people in relationships on earth. It's not possible for one to give everlasting pleasure to the other; each person has to make an individual effort to develop his or her own mind.

In one way, we Westerners are very ambitious in wanting to help others. Everybody is. For some reason Westerners have really good intentions, whether they're religious or not. "I really feel I want to help others. I want to do something to help." Of course, that can be an ego trip, too.

Nevertheless, somewhere within you is the motivation wanting to help others. Anyway, you're bored and suffering, so you want to do something. But wanting to help others when you're miserable, when you're suffering, is too emotional. You're confused and dissatisfied. As long as you're dissatisfied you can't give satisfaction to others. That's one hundred percent true. As long as I'm intoxicated by misery I cannot give happiness to others, I cannot free them from suffering. It's not possible.

Helping others doesn't simply mean relieving their physical pain. That's not the real meaning of helping others, because their body is not the actual source of their suffering. The essential, basic source is the mind. The mind makes us suffer; the mind makes us happy. The mind is the source of all happiness and unhappiness. Everything comes from the mind, from the energy of the mind.

So, if you really want to help others you need to understand the mind. If you don't know the nature of the mind you can't even cure your own misery. As long as you have not cured your

own disease of emotional misery, there's no way you can help others do it. That's just dreaming, completely dreaming.

Perhaps at this point you have a question arising: "Who says my life is unhappy? You, gorilla, say my life is miserable but you're wrong. I have a job, a house, a garden; I can go to the movies, I can watch television, I can do this, I can do that ...."

Yes, you can do all that, but with what kind of mind? Is the mind that experiences all the things you can do really happy? I can ask you a question of my own: is everything that you think to be happiness really happiness or not? Tibetans say, "A pig lives in a filthy enclosure but thinks it's a palace." Don't be like that.

Whoever we are, we usually have preconceived notions of what constitutes happiness and unhappiness. Different people have different ideas about the specifics, but in general it's like this. So you have to investigate for yourself if what you think is happiness really is happiness. If you check deeply with a penetrating, meditative mind, you will see that in reality, what you call happiness is actually misery. If you can see that, it's a kind of realization. That insight can be the beginning of your journey as a seeker of liberation.

As long as you think that a pigsty is a beautiful mandala, even though you might say you're a seeker of liberation, you're not. It's impossible, because you're trapped in a situation created by the dark shadow of ignorance in your mind.

I'm not trying to be dramatic here. I'm not saying that all life is miserable and bad. You have to understand what I'm saying without thinking that. I'm not saying that everything is miserable and hopeless, that there's no future on this earth and you'd be better off cutting your throat. The thing is that each of us has this fantasy about what is happiness and what's not; we all have this wrong conception. We have to recognize this wrong conception and let it go. If you can do that you'll become stable; you'll stop being overambitious. You'll accept that life changes. If somebody makes a mistake, you accept it. There's no more hypersensitive mind overreacting emotionally and making you go up and down, up and down all the time. Because you know how things are.

You can see how we are all involved with each other. Humans are constantly involved with other humans. And all this interaction between people who have extreme ambition in their mind causes conflict. We create trouble for each other. It all comes from the mind.

I've heard that half of all marriages end in divorce. Can you imagine how many millions of people must be miserable as a result? So where does that actually come from? The meeting, the getting together, the marriage, the divorce, the "goodbye, I don't like you and more"—all the ridiculous situations that happen on that particular trip. Who made all that? Check up. It comes from emotional ambition, grasping at fixed ideas, illusions. Two people meet: "Oh, you're so beautiful, fantastic." There's some kind of, "I've found such a precious companion." There's an incredible build-up of expectation from something that began with delusion. There's no way those expectations can be met, there's no way the other person can give you satisfaction, so sooner or later the two of you split. You can see how it happens.



These are common human experiences. If you understand how and why two people get together and then separate and finish up miserable, that's the lamrim! That's the lamrim. That you don't have to take on faith; you don't to adhere to some extreme religious trip to see the truth of that. You can see it at the scientific level.

Lord Buddha's teachings are so simple. You just have to check into your own life. Investigating how you live is the first step to renunciation. Once you have developed renunciation of samsara you're on the path to liberation. Knowledge of how samsara works is itself renunciation.

Don't think, as many do, that renunciation means giving something desirable up. But there's a dangerous fire burning inside you. That's what you have to extinguish; what you have to renounce, let go, is the flaming mind of grasping attachment. That's what's burning you.



*Lama Yeshe, Manjushri Institute, England, 1979. Photo by Brian Beresford.*

## *Illness and Death are Natural*

*From a teaching at the seventh Kopan meditation course, Kathmandu, Nepal, November 1974.*

It's important for Dharma students to understand Lord Buddha's scientific teachings on impermanence and death and not try to hide from or escape the reality of death. We need to face it. Of course, for people brought up the way they are these days, this topic might be a little bit too much, because in general nobody teaches you about this aspect of reality.

When I talk about death you might think, "Oh, that's Lama's thing, not mine," even though it's an undeniable fact that illness and death are within you right now. How can you reject your own nature? How can you escape from impermanence and death when you are living immersed in the conditions for them to arise right now?

That's why I always say that Buddhism is not diplomatic in character. It shows you straight up your own nature. But that doesn't mean you should cry emotionally, "No! That's too bad. I'm going to get sick and die. Dying is terrible!" Don't think in an ordinary way. Do you think that's wisdom? "Don't tell me that! I don't like it!" That's not wisdom. Check up carefully. Old people don't like that they're old so they just push back and deny it. Is that wisdom or not? From my point of view, from Buddhism's point of view, that's stupidity and ignorance. Rejecting how old you are; hiding from information about death. And you can't say that teachings on death are simply an Eastern custom. Is your death an Eastern custom? Has your death been created by Lord Buddha? No. Your death has not been created by Eastern custom, by Lord Buddha or by Buddhism. It's in your very nature, so how can you reject it?

Saying this doesn't mean I'm pushing you to get emotional and cry. I'm not. Those who get all emotional and cry, "Oh, that's too bad," are demonstrating stupidity, not wisdom. The reason I teach you about the impermanent nature of reality is for you to gain knowledge-wisdom. So check up.

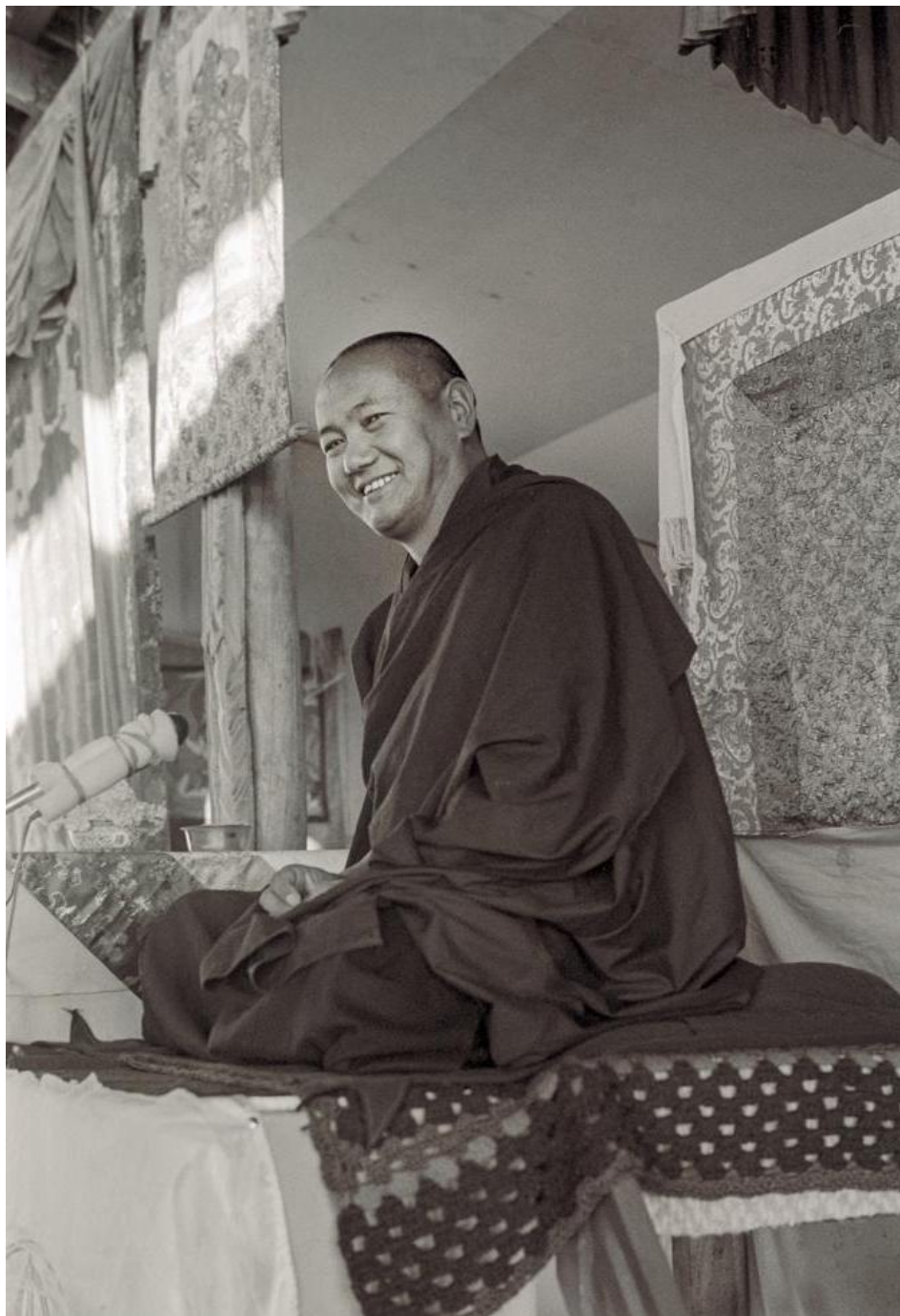
I'm not saying everybody thinks in this way, but this is what I call the street way of thinking; the way common, ordinary people think as they go shopping for ice cream. That way of thinking is stupid. Then there's trouble. "Lama's trying to scare me. I don't want to be scared. I just want to have ice cream and be happy. Tomorrow I'm out of here!"

So check up now. Wisdom is unemotional in nature. Fear of illness, impermanence and death is emotional; that's why you cry. That's why you can't sleep. You think, "I'm going to die tomorrow," and your stupid, relative emotions pump you up and push you so that you can't sleep. True understanding wisdom sees illness and death as natural, so there's no emotional nervousness upon hearing about impermanence and death.

Emotional fear of death is ignorance. We lamas are trying to show you that illness and death are natural and that understanding their inevitability is wisdom. These things that Lama Zopa and I talk about are really simple.

## *Karma*

*These four excerpts are from a teaching on karma at Chenrezig Institute, Eudlo, Australia, June 28, 1976.*



*Lama Yeshe, Chenrezig Institute, Australia, 1976.*

## Beginning to Understand Karma

There's not just one, fixed, mathematical way of explaining karma; there are many different ways, including the subheading and numbered list approach. Sometimes it seems that people new to Buddhism find karma hard to understand, but actually, it's easy to get a rough, initial understanding of it.

Of course, once you get into the details, karma can be extraordinarily complex, too, but when I introduce it to beginners, I try to keep it simple so that they can get at least a basic, intellectual understanding. In reality, the only way you can get a total understanding of karma is through your own experience, and that experience is beyond words.

Trying to get a total understanding of karma through the intellect alone is like trying to count every atom of earth, water, fire and air in the universe, which is impossible,

Fundamentally, what is karma? Karma is your body, speech and mind. That's it. It's very simple. If I were to try to compare the subject of karma to the kinds of things you study in the West, I'd say that it parallels in some ways the theory of the evolution of everything that exists. Karma encompasses everything on Earth and beyond, every existent phenomenon in the universe, throughout infinite space—in Buddhist terms, every phenomenon in samsara and nirvana. Karma is the energy of all phenomena and has nothing to do with what your mind believes.

If karma encompasses all relative phenomena, are these phenomena interconnected? Well, even modern science understands that all the energy in the universe is interdependently related; it's not just Buddhist dogma.

For example, where does all the green vegetation we see around us come from? It doesn't arise without cause. First there has to be a cause; then, the effect—the relative appearance of the green—arises. Similarly, each of us also has a cause; we, too, are interdependent phenomena. We depend on other energies for our existence. Those energies, in turn, depend on yet other energies. In this way, all energy is linked.

You probably think your body comes from the supermarket: as long as the supermarket's there, you can eat; as long as you can eat, you exist. Obviously, it goes much deeper than that. Therefore, your conception of what you are—"I am. I'm this; I'm that; I'm this"—is like a dream. Intuitively, your ego has this notion that you're independent, that you're not a dependent phenomenon. That's complete rubbish.

If you look, you can easily see how you're interdependent. It looks complicated; it's not complicated. It only becomes complicated if your mind thinks it's complicated. Your mind makes things up; that's karma, too—an interdependent phenomenon; it exists in relation to other energy. If you understand the basic simplicity of this, you'll be more careful in the way you act because you'll realize that every single action of your body, speech and mind produces a reaction.

We describe samsara as cyclic: it's like a wheel, it goes round; one thing produces another, that produces another, and so it goes on, one thing pushing the other. And each karmic

action is like the seed that produces a flower that in turn produces hundreds of seeds, which then result in hundreds more flowers that produce hundreds more seeds each. In this way, in a relatively short time, one seed produces thousands and thousands of results.

The actions of your body, speech and mind are the same. Each action, positive or negative, good or bad, produces an appropriate result.

Also, karma doesn't depend on your believing in it or not. The mere fact of your existence proves the existence of karma. Irrespective of whether you want to know about karma or not, whether you believe in it or not, it doesn't matter: you are karma. Whether you accept karma or reject it, you can't separate yourself from karma any more than you can separate yourself from energy. You are energy; you are karma. If you're a human being, it doesn't matter whether others think you're a human being or not—you're a human being. It doesn't depend on what you think, either. The truth of all existence doesn't depend on what people believe.

Sometimes you might think, "OK, Buddhists accept karma. They try to do good, avoid evil and perhaps enjoy positive results, but what about people who don't believe in karma?"

But whether you believe or not, your suffering and problems have a cause. They don't depend on what you believe. Do you think you suffer only because you think you suffer? No. Even if you say, "I'm not suffering," you're suffering. Suffering comes along with your very life.

Therefore, I often say that the Buddhist connotation of religion is a little different from the Western one. But when I say that, I'm not saying Buddhism is better; it's just different. Its analytical approach is different.

## **Karma is Definite**

When we teach karma, we often refer to its four characteristics, the first of which is that karma is definite.

Karma means action, your energy, and karma's being definite means that once you have set in motion a powerful train of energy, it will continue running until it either is interrupted or reaches its conclusion. Karma's being definite does not mean that once you have created a specific karma there's nothing you can do to stop it. That's a wrong view of karma.

Take, for example, the attitude of certain followers of the Hindu religion. You'll find many people like this in India and Nepal: they believe in karma, but they believe it's completely fixed. "I was born a carpenter. God gave me this life. I'll always be a carpenter." "My karma made me a cobbler; I'll always be a cobbler." They are very sincere in their belief, but very wrong in thinking that karma can't be changed. When Westerners come across such people they can't believe that they can think this way. Westerners know immediately from their own experience that if you really want to change your status in life you can do so.



But because these people's misconceptions are so strong, they can't change. It's silly, isn't it? That kind of super-belief is religious fanaticism. It's ignorant; it closes your mind and prevents you from expanding and developing it.

I also sometimes see great misconceptions about karma in new Dharma students. They read and think about karma, accept its existence, but then become too sensitive about it. If they make a mistake in their actions, they get emotionally terrified and guilty. That's wrong, too.

The karmic energy of your body, speech and mind comes from your consciousness. Some scientists say that there's a totality of energy from which all other energy manifests. Be that as it may, in the same way, all of the energy of your body, speech and mind comes from your consciousness, your mind—from your mind; your consciousness.

If you put your energy into a certain environment and a certain channel, a different form of energy will manifest. It changes. If you direct your conscious energy one way, one kind of result will come; if you direct it another way, a different kind of result arises. It's very simple. But what you have to know is from what source your actions come. Once you do, you'll see that you are responsible for what you do; you can determine what you do and what happens to you. It's more up to you than to your circumstances, friends, society or anything else outside you.

If, however, you don't know that it's possible to direct the energy of your body, speech and mind or how to do it, if you have no idea of how cause and effect operates in everyday life, then of course, you have no chance of putting your energy into positive channels instead of negative ones. It's impossible because you don't know.

Positive actions are those that bring positive reactions; negative actions are those that bring negative reactions, restlessness and confusion. Actions are termed positive or negative according to the nature of their effects.

In general, it's our motivation that determines whether our actions are positive or negative; our mental attitude. Some actions start out negative but can become positive due to the arising of an opposing kind of energy. The Abhidharma philosophical teachings talk about absolute positives, such as the true cessation of suffering, but for us, it's more important to understand positive and negative on the relative level. That's what we're dealing with in our everyday lives: relative positives and relative negatives.

However, we're usually unconscious whenever we act. For example, when we hurt our loved ones, it's mostly not deliberate but because we're unconscious in our actions. If we were aware that every action of our body, speech and mind constantly reacts internally within us and externally with others, we'd be more sensitive and gentle in what we did, said and thought.

Sometimes our actions are not at all gentle but like those of a wild animal. Next time you're acting like a wild animal, check up which channel your energy's in at that time and understand that you can change it—you have the power, the wisdom and the potential to do so. You can redirect your energy from the negative into the positive channel.

Also, you have to accept that you're going to make mistakes. Mistakes are possible. You're not Buddha. When you do make an error, instead of freaking out, acknowledge it. Be happy: "Oh, I made a mistake. It's good that I noticed." Once you've recognized a mistake, you can investigate it intensively: what's its background? What caused it? Mistakes don't just pop up without reason. Check in which channel your mind was running when that mistake happened. When you discover this, you can change your attitude.

In particular, you have to understand that negative actions come from you, so it's up to you to do something to prevent their negative reactions from manifesting. It's your responsibility to act and not sit back, waiting for the inevitable suffering result to arise.

Therefore, instead of simply accepting what happens to you, believing "This is my karma" and never trying to work with and change your energy for the better, understand that you can control what happens to you and be as aware of your actions as you possibly can.

## **Karma, Inner Strength and Life Itself**

To over-simplify, according to even normal society's way of thinking, anything you do dedicated to the benefit of others is automatically positive, whereas anything you do just for your own benefit automatically brings a negative reaction. Whenever you act selfishly, your heart feels tight, but when you try to really help others, psychologically you experience openness and a release that brings calm and understanding into your mind. That is positive; that is good karma.

However, if you don't actively check your motivation, you might think or say the words, "I'm working for the benefit of others," but actually be doing the opposite. For example, some rich people give money with the idea that they're helping others but what they really want to do is to enhance their own reputation. Such giving is not sincere and has nothing whatsoever to do with positive action or morality.

Giving with the expectation that others will admire you is giving for your own pleasure. The end result is that it makes you berserk, restless and confused. Check up. Look at the way normal people act; it's so simple. Even if you give away huge amounts of money, if you do it with selfish motivation, expecting tremendous results for yourself, you end up with nothingness. It's a psychological thing; there's more to giving than just the physical action.

Take me, for example. I can sit cross-legged in the meditation posture and you're going to think, "Oh, Lama's meditating." But if my mind is off on some incredible trip, although it looks as if I'm doing something positive, in fact I'm doing something completely neurotic and confused. You can never judge an action from its external appearance; its psychological component is much more important.

Therefore, be careful. In particular, acting out of loving kindness doesn't always mean smiling, hugging and telling people, "Oh, I love you so much." Of course, if that's what somebody needs, then go ahead and stroke or hug that person; I'm not saying that you have to give up all physical contact. You just have to know what's appropriate at any given time.

I have seen many students come to a meditation course, learn about love, compassion and bodhicitta for the first time, and at the end of the course be all fired up, wanting to help others: “Lama, I want to go to Calcutta and serve the sentient beings suffering there.”

I say, “You want to go? OK, go and try to help as best you can.” So they go, full of emotion, and, of course, see terrible suffering; poverty, starvation, disease and so forth. After a month, they have to leave, exhausted, because they find that simply going there, trying to help, isn’t really the solution.

A couple of my students, beautiful young women, went to Pakistan and Calcutta, hoping to express their loving kindness through serving where suffering was greatest. I told them to go, and return when the time was right. When they got there they discovered that what they were doing wasn’t really helping, and it wasn’t long before they were back.

Actually, expressing loving kindness through action is quite difficult. You have to be very skillful. It takes great wisdom. If you set out on a mission with no understanding, just a tight, emotional feeling of wanting to help, you’re in danger of losing yourself. For example, if you see somebody drowning and emotionally jump in without being able to swim, all that happens is that you both lose your lives.

Our physical energy is limited. Therefore, we’re limited in helping others in this way—we try to help others physically but come up empty; it’s beyond us. If you do want to help others out of loving kindness, act according to your ability and know your limits. Don’t overburden yourself because of emotion and incomplete understanding.

Mental energy, however, is practically unlimited. If we realize loving kindness, we’re like a ship. No matter how heavy the load, a ship can bear it. Similarly, with true loving kindness we can handle any situation that arises without freaking out. Furthermore, a ship does not discriminate; it carries whatever it’s given. Similarly, with loving kindness, we won’t favor one person over another: “You—come in; you—go away.”

When we practice Dharma and meditation, we build the inner strength necessary to be of greatest benefit to others and are able to face any difficulty that arises. Practitioners who are afraid to hear about suffering aren’t facing reality. The maha in Mahayana Buddhism means “great.” A Mahayana practitioner is supposed to be capacious and, like a ship, be able to take whatever comes along.

If we’re small-minded and hypersensitive, even tiny atoms can cause us to recoil: “I don’t want that atom.” That’s not the way of the Dharma practitioner.

Even the average, simple person who wants his or her life to be successful should be able to face whatever situation arises. If you freak out at the smallest thing, you’ll never make even this life successful. Everyday life is completely unpredictable; you can’t fix things to work out in a certain way. As things change, you have to change with them. You have to be flexible enough to deal with whatever happens.

If this is true for the ordinary person, how much more true must it be for the Dharma practitioner? You have to have the courage to face any difficulty that you encounter: “I can overcome any obstacle and reach perfect liberation.” Crossing the ocean of samsara is not

easy, but it's not samsara that's difficult—it's your own mind. What you actually have to cross is the ocean of your schizophrenic mind and you need to be confident that you can deal with that.

First you have to be able to think, "I can face whatever comes without running from it." Life is not easy; forget about meditation—life itself is hard. Things change; the mind changes. You have to face each change as it comes.

Going into retreat doesn't mean that you're running away from society and life because you're afraid of them. However, you need to develop confidence that you'll be able to handle anything that life throws at you. What you really need to judge, though, is what the most advantageous thing to do at any particular time is: to stay in society or go into retreat. Whatever you undertake is in your own hands; what you need to know is why you are doing it.



*Lama Yeshe, Chenrezig Institute, Australia, 1976.*

## Karma, Reality and Belief

We often talk about how we waste our lives following the eight worldly dharmas—attachment to temporal happiness, receiving material things, being praised and having a good reputation and aversion to their opposites: discomfort, not getting things, being criticized and notoriety. Each time we get involved with those, we create negative karma.

For example, when somebody praises you, you feel happy and puff up with pride, and when somebody criticizes you, you feel unhappy and depressed. Each time you go up and down like this, you create karma.

Why do you feel elated when praised and dejected when criticized? It's because you don't accept the way things truly are. You're controlled by your hallucinating mind, which is totally divorced from reality. Whether you're good or bad isn't determined by what other people think but by your own actions. These are your own responsibility. If all your actions are positive, even if I say "You're bad, you're bad, you're bad ..." all day, it won't affect your qualities. Therefore, you should understand what really makes an action positive or negative. It's not defined by what other people think.

This is scientific fact, not religious dogma. If you go up and down because of what other people say, you're hallucinating; you're not seeing reality. You should have strong confidence in your own actions and take full responsibility for them. Then, even if all sentient beings turn against you, you'll still be laughing. When you know what you are, you never get upset. If, on the other hand, your body and mind are weak, if you have no self-confidence and feel insecure, then of course you're going to experience problems.

All your feelings, perceptions, discriminations and the rest, especially those mental factors that bring negative reactions, arise from the hallucinating mind. Therefore, quite early in their training, I teach my students to meditate on the nature of feeling.

We always think that whatever we feel—physically or mentally—must be right. Similarly, we think that whatever we see is real; we really do believe in what we see. I'm not talking about spiritual belief in the supernatural; I'm saying that we believe in the concrete reality of what we see around us every day. Do you think that's right or wrong? It's wrong.

For example, say that you're tremendously attracted to a particular object. At that time you have a certain fixed idea of what that object is. But you're fantasizing; it's a hallucinated fantasy. If you check your mind of attraction closely, you'll see that its view is totally polluted and that what you perceive is a fantasy—neither the reality of the object nor that of the subject. A kind of cloud has appeared between your mind and the object and that's what you see. All delusions arise in that way.

So, in the end, who has more beliefs—a religious person or an atheist? It's the atheist. Atheists are prone to say, "I don't believe anything," but that's just their ego speaking. They believe what they see; they believe what they feel; they believe what they think. For example, atheists consider certain things beautiful—that's belief. This is the scientific truth of the situation. It doesn't matter whether or not they use the word "belief"—they believe; they're completely captivated by belief.



I can make the definitive statement that if your mind is clouded by the dark shadow of ignorance, if attachment rather than free communication is driving your personal involvements, you're a believer. This is simple and logical. That's why I always say that Dharma is very simple. It reveals the reality of yourself, your life and the things around you ... the reality of everything. That's the meaning of Dharma.

When some people go into a supermarket, they see the incredible display of goods as a reflection in a mirror. It's like when you look into a mirror, you see your reflection but at the same time you know it's not really you. That's how those whose view of the nature of the supermarket is closer to reality see it—like a reflection. Therefore, they can control any attachment that's likely to arise. Those whose view of the world is that of a more concrete reality see the goods in a supermarket as fantastic and can't stop their senses from vibrating.

That's the nature of ordinary attraction. Objects to which you're attached make you tremble with desire and things that you hate make you shake with anger. Either way, it's because you don't understand reality.

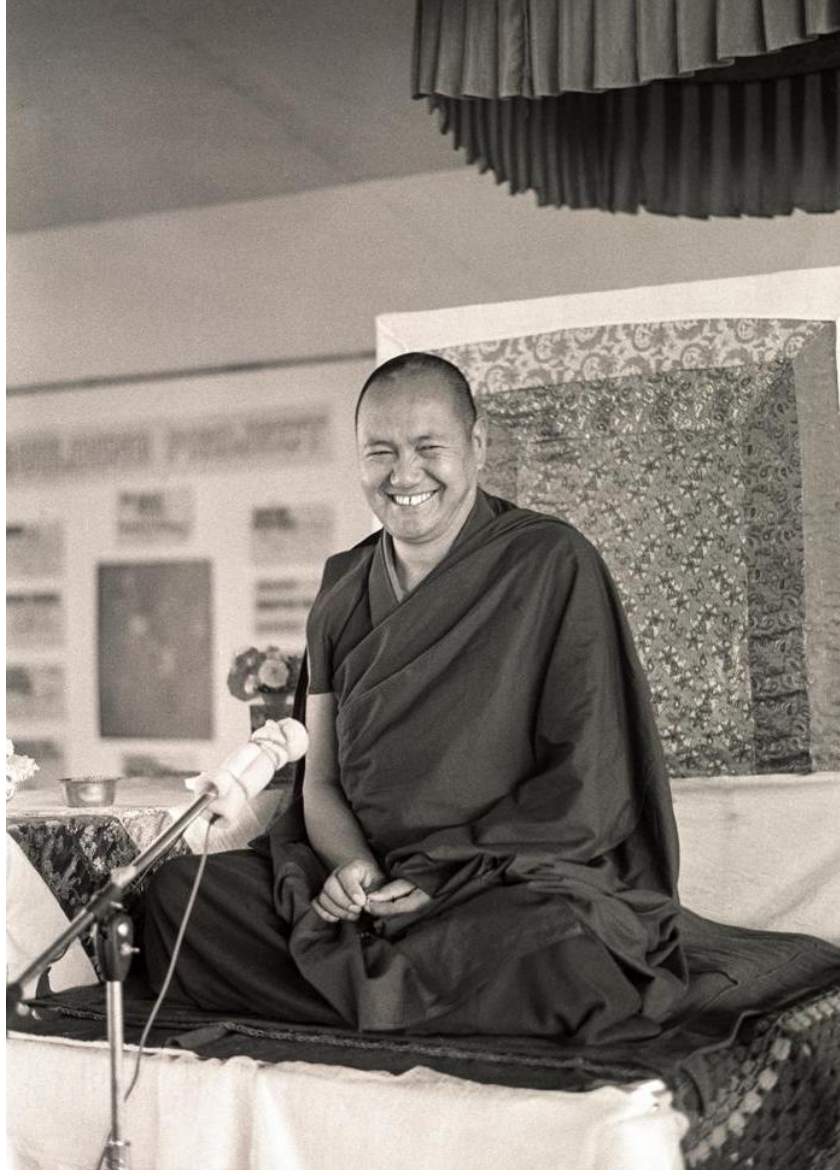
Actually, those who *really* understand the absolute nature of the supermarket don't see anything at all. The whole thing disappears. That might be too much for you to comprehend, but there's truth in what I'm saying.

In conclusion, then, no matter how negative the things you've done, if you have powerful understanding, you can purify them completely. There's no such concrete negative action that can never be purified; there's a solution for everything.

Some Christians speak of certain concrete sins that send you to a permanent, everlasting hell. I'm not criticizing; it's a philosophical point of view. It's good; it has a purpose. Any philosophy with a purpose is always good. But you should never think, "I have created such horrible negative actions that I'll never be able to overcome them." That's an incredible devaluation of your human nature. Any kind of negativity, no matter how great, can be purified. That's the power of the human mind.

That's why the lamrim starts out by teaching how great our human potential is. We have to understand the true value of our life. We always seek value externally. People even lose their lives in pursuit of material things or recreational pleasure. What a ridiculous waste of life!

Check within yourself very skillfully to see if you value material things more than your internal potential. That will show you how much you understand.



*Lama Yeshe, Chenrezig Institute, Australia, 1976.*

### ***Is Attachment Completely Negative?***

*From a teaching at the twelfth Kopan meditation course, Kathmandu, Nepal, November 1979.*

There are teachings in the lamrim that say we should be grateful for the eight worldly dharmas. Why is that? First of all, how can we gain liberation from samsara without transcending the eight worldly dharmas? Even Shakyamuni Buddha himself went through them on his way to enlightenment. It's part of our spiritual evolution. At some point, having gone through the eight worldly dharmas, we reach beyond them, attaining liberation or even enlightenment.

In his lamrim teachings, Lama Tsongkhapa very clearly describes three types of eight worldly dharmas: black, mixed and white. When we engage in worldly activity, one aspect of our action might be good, but as we're doing it a negative thought can arise so that the result will be sort of mixed. So philosophically, and this is also in the lamrim, you can't say that all attachment is negative. Westerners can be over-sensitive. They see in the lamrim that attachment is our biggest problem and conclude that it must be completely negative. Lama Tsongkhapa says, "No!"

Logically we can see that, from the Buddhist point of view, all human life, including our body, comes from the positive mind. It's positive karma that produces this body that gives us the ability to enjoy things. But, as human beings, we have limitations. When the lamrim teachings highlight certain aspects of our life as negative, we can jump to the conclusion that everything to do with attachment is negative: "I am completely negative; the world is completely negative." Then everything gets very dark, because that's the exaggerated way in which we project or interpret it.

I want you to understand clean clear that we distinguish two things: negative, or sinful, and positive. Attachment, or desire, can be negative and sinful, but it can also be positive. The positive aspect is that which produces pleasure: samsaric pleasure, human pleasure—the ability to enjoy the world, to see it as beautiful, to have whatever you find attractive.

So you cannot say that all desire is negative and produces only pain. Wrong. You should not think like that. Desire can produce pleasure—but only temporary pleasure. That's the distinction. It's temporary pleasure. And we don't say that temporal pleasure is always bad, that you should reject it. If you reject temporal pleasure, then what's left? You haven't attained eternal happiness yet, so all that's left is misery.

But you should not make the mistake of trying to actualize temporary pleasure [as an end in itself]. You can enjoy it while you have it but you should not squeeze yourself striving for it. The problem is the mind that believes temporary pleasure to be the best there is. That's a total delusion, an over-estimated conception. Like looking at a cloud in the sky and thinking, "What a beautiful cloud; I wish it would last forever." You're dreaming.

We should recognize all our human pleasures as similarly impermanent. They come; they go. They're limited and we should expect them to be limited. That's their nature. Our expectations should always be in accord with the way things are. Therefore we should not grasp at temporary pleasure as if it were eternal, everlasting happiness. That's deluded, a fantasy.

Of course, the lamrim and Mahayana Buddhism in general talk about attachment and self-cherishing as incredibly big problems. And when you hear that, you might think, "I want to give them up today!" You can't. It's impossible; you're too ambitious. You need to understand that attachment is a problem in everyday life because you have too many fixed ideas and unreasonable expectations. You can't give all that up overnight. Work it out slowly: "I'm grateful to understand how attachment works, but it will take time to overcome it. There are certain things I can handle now but I can't manage everything at once."

Remember what I said about the mixed eight worldly dharmas—actions that are a little bit white and a little bit black so that the results are mixed too; not totally negative. So you have to see where you fall in this and use your own judgment when deciding how to deal with your own attachment. Just don't look at all attachment as completely negative. It's not. There are degrees of attachment.

You've probably heard about the five paths and the ten bodhisattva levels (Skt: bhumi). For example, there are the paths of merit, preparation and right seeing, at which point one attains the first bhumi. It's quite a long journey. From there up to the eighth bhumi, you can still have some attachment. As I said, it has degrees.

Knowing this, we beginners should be encouraged that it is only when we reach the incredibly high eighth bodhisattva bhumi that we are completely free of attachment. Starting from where we are, we first deal with its gross levels and slowly, slowly rid ourselves of it.

So don't be too idealistic: "How fantastic. Lama has told me all about attachment," and then go home and tell your father, "Your problem is attachment," your boyfriend, "Your problem is attachment." Everything is attachment. Then people start telling you, "You know what? *Your* problem is attachment."

Well, philosophically, we might understand attachment clean clear, but in practice we have to be reasonable and, as the lamrim explains, have a realistic attitude toward attachment. So, if you see some benefit for yourself or others in doing something, even small, although it might be tinged by attachment, do it. Do what you can; that's good enough.

When some Westerners first encounter the lamrim teachings they get the impression that it's all about suffering: "Buddhism says I've been suffering since forever! I *should* be suffering!" Since they've been brought up to believe that in fact they should *not* suffer and should always enjoy pleasure, they really don't like this Eastern way of thinking and can't reconcile the two. Have you felt like that? Anyway, it's not true. Buddhism wants you and all other sentient beings to discover everlasting happiness and bliss; eternal peace. That's the enlightenment experience; that's the goal of the lamrim teachings. Don't think that small worldly pleasures are the only happiness there is; that if you just have this thing or that, you'll be happy. That's small, narrow-minded thinking. And that's the problem.

Worldly happiness is OK but judge it reasonably. Enjoy it without grasping at it as real, which only results in more pain. That's all that Buddhism is talking about. You *should* have pleasure and not feel guilty when you do. What do I mean by pleasure? It's a feeling that satisfies you for a moment and doesn't disturb your mind. You get a little pleasure—that's good enough. Accept it for what it is and don't feel guilty. Be as happy as possible. If you're irritated, how can you be peaceful within yourself or give happiness to those around you?

If I'm crying my eyes out and at the same time saying, "I want to give you happiness, I want to give you happiness," you're not going to know how to handle me. "He wants to give me happiness but he's crying." Soon you're going to start crying too. All we do is make each other cry.

Therefore, if you're experiencing pleasure, be reasonable; remain calm and clear, even if you notice that your grasping mind is there beneath it all. And if you have a feeling of loving kindness toward another, enjoy that too. Don't feel guilty.



*Lama Yeshe gardening, Kopan Monastery, 1981. Photo by Jan-Paul Kool.*



## *Anger and the Enemy*

*Lama Yeshe answered these questions after a talk on “Anxiety in the Nuclear Age,” given at the University of California, Santa Cruz, USA, July 23, 1983.*

*Q:* When we feel anger what should we do? Repress it, show it if it's not harmful to others, or ignore it?

*Lama:* The first thing you can do when somebody makes you angry is to analyze the situation, especially what caused it and its effect. When you analyze the situation, start by looking at how anger projects its object—how it concretizes and exaggerates the object. When you analyze the evolution of your anger in detail you can't find that concrete object anywhere. That's one way of eliminating anger.

Another thing you can consider is if it's worth hanging onto your anger. The moment you conclude that it's not worthwhile, that anger destroys yourself and others, you can change your mind and let it go. The inner conversation that breeds resentment and perpetuates anger—“He did this, she did that, he did this, she did that”—simply agitates your mind and is completely not worthwhile.

By analyzing the evolution of your anger and seeing what a ridiculous mind it is, you can weaken and eliminate it even intellectually. Anger can arise over really small and silly situations. For instance, families can argue over where to put a bowl of flowers. “I put it here, my wife wants it there,” and from that small beginning a huge fight can erupt. We don't need big reasons. Simply not accepting change can cause anger to arise. So we need to analyze reality. Things change; that's their nature. Accept and let go. Put it here, put it there—what difference does it make? Sometimes we think something's so important and desperately want it to remain as it is. That's wrong and can often lead to anger.

Buddhism always stresses impermanence; change is natural. It has nothing to do with concepts. Flowers gradually evolve from seeds planted in the ground; babies grow into children, then adults, age then die. This is the natural way things go. Wives change; husbands change; girlfriends change; boyfriends change—it's all natural.

Therefore it's very important to accept change because it's respecting nature. When you're angry you don't respect others. Others want to change something but you don't—that means you're disrespecting others' will and the natural process of change.

And the main thing is that Buddhism considers anger to be the worst of all delusions. Unlike desire, anger is always negative—there's no exception. The moment you get angry, you become negative and others appear negative to you. Buddhism does make an exception for desire; even though it's usually negative, there's a way to make it positive and bring positive results.

So, since anger is our worst enemy, we have to make every effort to abandon it; trying to do so is good enough. We should try, thinking, “Anger destroys my peace and pleasure and that of others. Controlling it is of utmost importance in my life.”



When we get angry, how do we see the object of our anger? In the morning, that person may have looked extremely attractive but in the afternoon, when we're angry, he looks horrible, ugly. Obviously it's not possible that he changed so radically from his side; it's simply our projection exaggerating what we perceive as his bad qualities. Therefore we shouldn't believe that he's really bad but recognize our view and reaction as coming from our own mind.

*Q:* Lama Yeshe, what about killing to preserve the lives of other beings? Is it ever acceptable to kill in order to save others?

*Lama:* That's a very dangerous question. I want you to listen very carefully to my reply so that you don't misunderstand what I say. So, let's say I have a nuclear weapon and am planning to blow up New York City and kill millions of people and you know clean clear that this is my intention. I think it would be all right if, out of great love, great compassion and great wisdom, you were to kill me. Why? Because you'd be doing it for the sake of all those people whose lives I'd have destroyed.

This question is similar to what several of my medical doctor students have asked me. Some of them have been disturbed because they have had to kill rats and monkeys in medical experiments; they know Buddhists aren't supposed to kill any living being.

I have to answer, don't I? I can't ignore them. So I say, "Well, as long as your research will benefit humankind and even animals as well, I guess experimenting on and killing one monkey might be OK."

The point is, if you have great compassion and a clear understanding of what benefits the majority, perhaps there can be exceptions. But still, I have some doubt. If our understanding is limited we can easily make mistakes. Therefore, exceptions to the Buddha's injunction not to kill would be extremely rare.

*Q:* How should we deal with people who consider us as their enemies or people who don't trust us?

*Lama:* With compassion—according to the way I was educated, people who hate you are objects of love and compassion. Why? Because they are not enemies forever; tomorrow they can become friends. Therefore there's no such thing as a self-existent, concrete enemy.

We should know from our own experience that things always change. Today somebody can be a dear friend, tomorrow an enemy. Who knows? It's all so relative, but so common—look at how many marriages break up, with people who were once loving partners regarding each other as mortal enemies. Before they couldn't bear to be apart; now they can't stand the sight of each other.

Therefore I think it's important to deeply imprint your mind with the knowledge that there's no external enemy so that if one appears to manifest today you don't get caught up in hatred and just let go, thinking, "By hating me he's hurting himself; he's suffering. What is it in me that upsets him so much?" Do you see Buddhism's reverse thinking? We think there's some kind of destructive vibration in me that makes him hate me. I'm actually responsible for others not liking me. This is opposite to what we normally think; we think the hurt inflicted on us by our enemy is his fault.

Lord Buddha's psychology is that we have some kind of negative magnetic energy within us that stimulates anger to manifest in another person who we then label "enemy." Controlling that energy within us is the best way to eliminate enemies. From the Buddhist point of view, seeing others as enemies and wanting to destroy them is completely wrong.

The great bodhisattva Shantideva said that if the ground is covered in thorns it's easier to avoid getting stuck by putting on shoes than by covering the ground with leather. Wearing shoes has the same effect as covering the ground with leather. Similarly, if we control our anger with patience, no external enemy can be found. Our main enemy is within; that's the one we have to conquer. If you try to destroy external enemies how far can you get? Maybe you can kill one or two people, but more enemies will arise. You can't get rid of enemies that way. But if you get rid of the mind that sees enemies, no further enemies will ever be seen.

## ***How to Let Go: How to Integrate Emptiness in Everyday Life***

*Lama Yeshe gave this teaching at Institut Vajra Yogini, Marzens, France, September 5, 1983.*

What is emptiness? Emptiness (Skt: *shunyata*) is the reality of the existence of ourselves and all the phenomena around us. According to the Buddhist point of view, seeking reality and seeking liberation amount to the same thing. The person who doesn't want to seek reality doesn't really want to seek liberation and is just confused.

If you seek reality and you think that it has to be shown to you by a Tibetan lama, that you have to look for it outside yourself, in another place—maybe in Shangri-la!—then you are mistaken. You cannot seek reality outside yourself because you are reality.

Perhaps you think that your life, your reality was made by society, by your friends. If you think that way you are far from reality. If you think that your existence, your life was made by somebody else it means that you are not taking the responsibility to understand reality.

You have to see that your attitudes, your view of the world, of your experiences, of your girlfriend or boyfriend, of your own self, are all the interpretation of your own mind, your own imagination. They are your own projection, your mind literally made them up. If you don't understand this then you have very little chance of understanding emptiness.

This is not just the Buddhist view but also the experience of Western physicists and philosophers—they have researched into reality too. Physicists look and look, and they simply cannot find one entity that exists in a permanent, stable way: this is the Western experience of emptiness.

If you can imagine that then you will not have any concrete concepts; if you understand this experience of physicists, then you will let go of your worldly problems—but you don't want to understand.

At the energy level there is space and there is body, and both have the same four elements. There is an interdependence between these two energies, the one around us and our own energy.

You check up, analyze: your skin, your bones, your nose, face are only energy, no more. If you try to separate them from energy then nothing will be left of your skin, your bones, your nose, your face. Everything is simply energy. If you understand the energy level of existence, if you really understand who you are, what you are in this way then you will break down your concepts, your uptightness, you will break down the preconceptions you have of your own self-existence. But no way! You are always uptight and that is why you have problems.

It seems to me that we twentieth century people are against nature, against reality, the very opposite of reality. Each moment we build up our artificial, polluted ego; we cover ourselves with heavy ego blankets—one, two, ten, one hundred blankets against nature, against reality.

In industrialized countries we disturb nature, we don't appreciate the value of nature. Nature has its own value but we shake nature, we completely change it, we don't respect the harmony of nature. We destroy this harmony because we don't communicate with nature.

Modern life the product of the intellectual mind, and we create it. The intellectual mind is superstition. We don't understand reality, and the intellectual life that we live keeps us far from reality.

So we don't accept what we are. We are always looking to cover ourselves with thick blankets and say, "This is me." We hide our own reality and run away from natural beauty, completely neglecting it. By not touching our reality our modern life becomes so complicated and we create problems with our superstitions. We are like a spider spinning his web, climbing on his thread then falling down; climbing up again and falling down again. In the same way we build our own intellectual web, a way of life, that is so complicated, that doesn't touch reality, that is so difficult to live in. This construction arises from our own mind and does not arise from anything else.

If I said you are nothing, you are zero, that you are nothing that you think you are, then you would be shocked. "What is this monk saying?" But what if I say that it is the truth! In fact you are non-duality, non-self-existence. You do not exist, relatively or absolutely, as you think you do. If you really understood this then you would really gain satisfaction and peace. But as long as you hold on to the fantasy, concrete conception of yourself and project this wrong conception onto your environment, then no way will you understand reality!

In Western cities nowadays, you can see, the older you are the more problems you have. When we are young, not so many problems, but then there are drugs and sex, and eventually they become dissatisfying. Then marriage is dissatisfying, then more depression, more depression. You can see, this technical society produces more depressed people than the countryside does. Countryside people live more naturally.

So as your body becomes bigger and your brain becomes wider, you have more and more problems and become more and more depressed. The more money you have the more problems come. You can see this. It shows we are deluded, polluted, degenerated, that our life is too intellectual, too covered by wrong conceptions.

You only take care of your body, you never take care of your mind, and the result of this imbalance is depression. For most Western people this is the case: only the body is reality

and they don't care about the existence of the mind, the soul, the consciousness. They don't believe they can change their mind. They can change their nose through an operation but they don't believe they change their mind. And when you believe this then no way can you resolve your depression.

I was really surprised to learn that there was a French philosopher before the coming of Jesus Christ on this earth who explained about the consciousness and the body. That the evolution of the mind was different from the evolution of the body and that our mind, consciousness, is something that is everywhere, not just localized in the heart or the brain. This surprised me very much because it is very Buddhist. And you have forgotten this French philosopher's declaration, haven't you?

Our thoughts, our mind or consciousness is mental energy and cannot be localized in the body. It cannot be touched, it has no form and does not travel in time and space. We cannot touch it or grasp at it.

What is important to understand is that the view you have of yourself and the view you have of your environment are based on your own mind: they are a projection of your mind and that is why they are not reality.

I will give you a good example. When a French man or woman looks for a girl or boyfriend, there is this research energy from both sides and when suddenly they see each other they make up an incredible story. "Oh, so beautiful! Nothing wrong inside or outside." They build up a perfect myth. They push and push, the mind makes it all up. If they are Christian they say, "Oh, he looks just like Jesus." Or "She looks just like an angel. She is so nice, so pure. I wish always to hear her!" Actually, they are just projecting their own fantasies onto each other.

If she is Hindu, then he would say, "Oh she looks like Kali, like Mother Earth, like my universal mother. I hope to always be near her. She will teach me who I am and where I am going. Each time I see her, my whole body shakes. I am sure that it must be incredible karma! And because it is our karma I have to serve her, to accept!" You understand? Actually, you are making the karma at that moment, you are inventing it. Of course, you do have some connection, but ....

And if you are Buddhist you fold your hands and say, "Oh, she is a dakini and she is showing me the true nature of all things." You understand? "When I am near her, she gives me energy. Before, I was so lazy, I couldn't move, I was like a dead person. But now whenever I go near her, I can't believe my energy!" I tell you, all this is superstitious interpretation. You think that she is your spiritual friend and that before you were not so clear and that now she speaks to you about Dharma and everything becomes clearer. And all she does is really perfect, even her *kaka* and *pipi* are so pure! Excuse me, perhaps I shouldn't talk like this—I'm a Buddhist monk! But when we speak about Buddhism, about reality, then we have to speak practically from daily life, about what is earthy, what we can touch and see, not just get caught up in concepts.

What I mean is this: you should recognize how every appearance in your daily life is in fact a false projection of your own mind. Your own mind makes it up and becomes an obstacle to

touching reality. This is why, our entire life, no matter what kind of life we have, it is a disaster. If you have a rich life, your life is a disaster. If you have a middle-class life, your life is a disaster. If you have a poor life, your life is even more of a disaster! You become a monk and your life is a disaster. You become a nun and your life is a disaster. If you become a Christian, your life is a disaster. If you become a Hindu, your life is a disaster. If you become a Buddhist, your life is a disaster. If you become a Muslim, your life is also a disaster. Be honest. Be honest with yourself!

Even if you go to a cave, disaster! You can stay in a mountain cave, in the snowy mountains, and still you carry your ego with you. You carry your entire world with you and all your fantasy clothing doesn't help.

I'm not talking about religion here, I'm talking about personal things, *who* we are, *what* we are, *where* we are going, *what* we are doing! I am disaster, my mind is making it. Everything is always with me, always with me, my attitudes poison me. *That* is what I am talking about.

All this religion you follow—as long as you don't touch reality in yourself, as long as you don't eradicate your fantasies, you are a disaster. (Now I am disaster hot!)

In fact, reality is very simple. The simplicity of the mind can touch reality, and meditation is something that goes beyond the intellect and brings the mind into its natural state. We have this pure nature already, this reality exists in us now, it is born with us. Of course, I'm not saying that having this pure nature means you are Buddha or God already: that is not what I'm saying. There are two interpretations possible about this pure nature.

Our consciousness or our soul are conventionally not contaminated, not really, absolutely contaminated or polluted by our fantasy. And our consciousness can be compared to the sky that is temporarily covered by clouds: the pure nature of our mind can be temporarily covered by our fantasy-ego. Our fantasy-ego is like clouds, sometimes black, heavy; sometimes a little bit of white comes, sometime yellow clouds, sometimes red. Eventually, they all pass and disappear.

What I am saying is that the essence of your consciousness, your truth, your soul is not absolutely negative, it does not have an essentially negative character. Our mind is like the sky and our problems of ego-grasping and self-pity are like clouds. You should not believe “I *am* my ego, I *am* my problems, therefore I cannot solve my problems.” Wrong!

You can see. Sometimes we are so clear in our life, we are almost radiating. We can have this experience *right now*. *Now!*

So it is wrong to think that we are always a disaster; not true. Sometimes we are clean clear, sometimes we are disaster. So, stay in meditation, just keep in that clean-clear state as much as possible. All of us can have this clean-clear state of mind, we can have it.

I will give you an example. You will notice that most of the time when we first wake up our mind is clear. Why? Because we are not yet influenced by the artificial intellectual pollution of our thoughts. This is why we advise meditation in the morning. When you sleep, all your rubbish problems and disaster thinking just naturally go into an unconscious state, into clean-clear consciousness. Just naturally the senses close and there is no more grasping at

sense objects. This is why sleep is sometimes very good, especially if you are restless and full of fantasy and garbage thoughts in the mind. It is a natural thing, sleep. The functioning of a human being is something so natural.

The tantric teachings of Tibetan Buddhism explain that at death time also you experience this reality. And it is complete bliss, it is the best experience of your life and the highest experience of reality. You have heard about this clear light? It is the highest experience of reality.

Why? Why is death the highest experience? Why is life not the highest experience? Because our life-mind is full of intellectualizing, full of thinking, full of speculation, full of fantasies. But at the time of death fantasies naturally stop, the gross I naturally stops. Our nose and mouth and ears, our six consciousnesses, naturally stop. These consciousness, these busy fantasy resources are packed away into the soul, the clear light consciousness, and this becomes like our own nuclear energy that everything else has completely gone into. This is the natural, absolutely natural explanation of the human being.

With meditation we can change the inner flow of our energy, we can change bad times, that time, this time, we can release our emotions.

Actually, maybe this is the moment to meditate. My feeling is to meditate now. So close your eyes, don't think "I am meditating," just close your eyes and whatever view is there, whatever vision is there in your mind, just be aware. Don't interpret good, bad. Just be like a light, your consciousness is like a light and light doesn't think "I like this, I like that"; it is just a light. Whatever is in your consciousness, whatever experience, just be aware, that is all.

Whatever you experience at the moment, whatever color, whatever appearance is there, just stay aware. Be aware. If it's black energy, then that black energy is clean clear. If it's white energy, just feel that clean-clear state.

Be aware of whatever is happening. No interpretation. Especially if nothing is coming, believe that this is the truth, and if nothing is going, that is zero, that is truth, reality.

Don't try to hold on to something or to reject something. Just have intensive awareness. The entirety of you has the characteristic of space, of non-duality. This non-duality is your character. Your energy floats into the space of non-duality. The cosmos energy comes into your entire body and your body energy goes into the cosmos energy.

All your egotistic, individualistic views vanish, all interdependent relationships disappear. Try to actualize this experience.

Therefore Buddha said: there is no dualistic form, there is no dualistic sound, there is no dualistic smell, there is no dualistic taste, there is no dualistic touch, there is no dualistic view, there is no dualistic nose, tongue, there is no dualistic leg, no dualistic stomach, there is no dualistic bone, no dualistic heart, no dualistic brain. All this energy is conventional. At the absolute level there is only the non-dualistic reality.

So, try to touch this non-dualistic reality. *Let go!*



'There are no dualistic friends because there is no dualistic me. There is no dualistic enemy because there is no dualistic me. There is no dualistic girlfriend because there is no dualistic me. There is no dualistic boyfriend because there is no dualistic me.

Therefore, the mind is in an equal state of non-duality. It is an experience of equality, of harmony, a universal experience, because all individual objects are just projected by concepts and superstition.

Experience this total harmony, this total peace. In this state there is no more pleasure, no more suffering. Everything is simply a projection of the human mind.

So, now we dedicate with prayers: May all sentient beings discover that all the appearances of their ego are projections of their mind. Whatever self-existent thoughts, whatever concrete concepts of objects, whatever fears they have, may they discover them to be mental projections and also may the nature of the mind be recognized as non-dual.



*Lama Yeshe, Pyramid Lake, 1980.*

## *Contacting the Bodhgaya Within*

*Excerpted from a Vajrayogini commentary given at Institut Vajra Yogini, Marzens, France, October 1981. Edited by Hermes Brandt.*

Once, a long time ago, a Tibetan lama wanted to go to India to see his guru there. One of his disciples said to him, “For what reason are you going to India? There is no reason to go. The inner guru is within your nervous system, and if you want to see the deities and create good karma, make offerings to the body mandala within your nervous system, to the dakas and dakinis in your nervous system.” The disciple said many things like that, and his guru could not answer.

We can also make the similar observation that our Western minds are often bored within one place, and we desire to go to another. “Oh, I’ve heard that the beaches in Greece are so nice. So are those in Bali and Hawaii.” People consider these good places to go to, but actually the good places of Greece, Bali and Hawaii are inside our nervous system, which interprets these places as good. Similarly, we always look outside to see physically beautiful sense objects, although there is beauty also within us. Where outside is that quality we consider beautiful? Show me where outside that quality is. In Greece? Not possible. It’s not possible that you can find the Vajrayogini quality on Greek beaches.

We think about Bodhgaya, where Shakyamuni became enlightened. So, we go there, look around and feel something too. Enlightenment? We feel something, but we never feel that we have the potential of enlightenment. Perhaps enlightenment exists within us right now. That we ignore. But we go on pilgrimages, hassling with airplanes, hotels and all our heavy luggage. Well, perhaps it is good for some people, but my lazy mind is completely convinced that instead of going on pilgrimage, it is better for me to do just one hour of OM MANI PADME HUM mantras. No, not even one hour, perhaps for only ten minutes. By comparison, I think the energy I would expend in going from here all the way to the East, going around stupas and seeing such things, is rubbish. That’s what my lazy mind thinks. I’m not saying this is so for everyone.

For example, we stay in Kathmandu. In Nepal there are incredible holy places, such as the place where Lord Buddha gave his body to the tigers, or stupas like the one in Swayambhunath, where relics from the bodies of Nagarjuna and Vasubandhu are stored. I’m lucky if my lazy mind sees those things once a year. Inside I feel no encouragement to go to those places. Nor do I feel guilty. Maybe I’m sick, but I’m convinced. I also don’t do the mantras, but I feel that if I did just ten minutes of mantra with contemplation, it would be much more powerful than going around looking. Of course, I believe that such pilgrimages can have some good karma, but there’s no shaking inside, nothing is stirred up enough.

Actually, Bodhgaya, the real essential place where Lord Buddha gave the paramita, is inside us. In tantra we have the twenty-four holy places on earth, where many dakas and dakinis live. Also, we have twenty-four holy places within us. Whatever place in the external world we think is holy is, in reality, within this precious human body.



*Lama Yeshe, Kopan Monastery, Nepal, 1980.*

## ***Visualizing Yourself as a Deity***

*From a teaching at Manjushri Institute, Cumbria, England, July 1977.*

When we practice tantric yoga method sadhanas and transform our consciousness into the transcendent, rainbow body of our meditation deity we should simultaneously recognize the unity of the rainbow body and its non-dual nature. The rainbow body of the deity is totally non-dual. Non-duality and the transformation, the transcendent experience of the clean-clear, crystal rainbow body, are completely one. It's like it's there, but it's not there. If you were to try to touch it, it would be like trying to touch a rainbow. Your hand can't feel it yet there's something there. It's real; there's some energy there. You can't say that a rainbow isn't real because you can't touch it by hand.

Sometimes when I'm watering my garden there's a rainbow in the spray. If there are any students around, we'll have a conversation about the reality of a rainbow. Our physical senses are really gross, and because a rainbow is relatively insubstantial, we tend to think it's nonexistent. But a rainbow is as existent as a concrete wall. We can't say that a wall is more existent than a rainbow just because it feels solid to the touch. Both are equally real.

How does a rainbow exist? Through the coming together of various factors, such as water, light and so forth. It's an interdependent phenomenon that simply reflects the combined energies that make it up. That's the way in which it exists and that's all there is to what we

call a rainbow. We know it's not solid, that it's simply a conglomeration of parts to which we give the name rainbow.

The way in which the transformation—the transcendent experience of the divine deity body—exists is exactly the same as the way in which a rainbow exists. In reality it, too, exists but in experiencing unification we recognize it as non-dual, non-self-existent and insubstantial. There's nothing physical to touch; it's simply the reflection of a combination of parts in the mirror of wisdom. Although it is a clearly apparent vision, completely transparent, simultaneously it is absolutely non-dual in nature.

By developing this kind of awareness, we become more sensitive and our dull, animal attitude is eliminated. We become more sensitive to the subtler aspects of reality. Then even concrete walls can appear to us as insubstantial and as something we can perhaps pass through. We can have such powerful experiences.

Perhaps you've heard stories of some of the early Mahayana yogis and yoginis who left imprints of their hand in stone or stepped into rocks as if they were pools of water. We think these are simply magic tricks, hypnotic illusions. That's not true. We don't believe such things are possible because of our limited view of the nature of material energy but such things are not only possible, they happened.

I've seen people on TV smashing a pile of bricks with their bare hands. It looks like magic. If I brought a pile of bricks into this room, how many of you could smash even one with your bare hands? It looks like a magic trick, but it's not. We know that there are people everywhere who can do this. How do they explain it? They say that instead of regarding the bricks as physical they regard them more as a concentration of energy and by focusing their mind they are able to smash them by hand.

Our problem is that when we are faced with something like this, inside us there's a mind going, "Impossible, impossible, impossible. I can't, I can't, I can't." We have to banish that mind from this solar system. Anything is possible; everything is possible. Sometimes you feel that your dreams are impossible, but they're not. Human beings have great potential; they can do anything. The power of the mind is incredible, limitless.

In the meditation session, then, we try to experience the unity of insubstantiality, non-self-existence, and the blissful, radiant, rainbow body and single-pointedly contemplate on that. But then you might ask, "It's all very well doing this in retreat but what happens when I get back home and have to go to work? How can I meditate on non-self-existence in the real world?"

The answer is that if you can have an experience of non-duality during formal meditation, when you are out and about during the breaks, working or doing whatever else you do, when you look at the objects of the sense world you can simultaneously perceive their non-duality. Then the normal concrete vision that once made you feel small and insignificant no longer dominates your life.

When you're at a retreat course you should be contemplating in this way all the time: during the meditation and discourse sessions and when you get up and go outside during the

breaks, as well. As I always say, you should make the break times meditation sessions too. Transform everybody you see as well as all other objects into the divine Manjushri rainbow body and recognize the unity of the blissful light body and non-duality.

People have different experiences when they try to meditate. For example, you might find that for the first half of a one-hour session, your concentration is good, but for the last half hour it's impossible. Too much superstition arises. This shows that your energy is unbalanced. You put too much energy into the beginning of your session and when it's used up, you come down. Sometimes this can simply be the result of physical weakness and eating food or having a drink can solve the problem. More often it's a result of unskillful practice. Instead of putting all that effort into the beginning of the session, start off in a more relaxed fashion and try to ration your mental energy so that it lasts the entire hour.

Other people find that they have too many superstitions at the beginning of the session but that after about thirty minutes they settle down and their concentration is good from then on. That's often the fault of not being mindful before the session begins and bringing outside influences into the session with you. Because of that, you don't have enough penetrative energy at the start, but as the outside influences wear off, your concentration improves. In the previous example you needed to slacken your energy at the beginning; here you need to put in more effort at the start.

Meditation means working with mental energy, so you need to be sensitive to how much fuel you're adding to the fire. If you don't put in enough, the fire dies out. If you put in too much, it finishes too quickly. You should learn from experience how much effort to exert at which time.

Also, when you meditate, you can start speculating: "Now I'm a meditator. Before, I wasn't a meditator. Perhaps today I'll get enlightened." You start to think about the past, present and future. That's not good; that, too, is superstition. Make a conscious effort to stop stimulating discursive thought. Some people distract themselves by thinking, "This is great; I'm getting beautiful visions. I'm blissful." Or you might start visualizing others having a good time, dancing or whatever, and get caught up in being a spectator, distracting yourself in that way. All this is just more superstition. Perhaps you start intellectualizing, "Let me see if I can become nothingness" or "Let me see if I can visualize the most beautiful deity." This sort of mental expression is distraction; it is in the nature of superstition.

The main point of contemplation, of visualizing this evolution into the deity, is to stop your ego and superstition from functioning, so all such mental speculation is uptight energy that only makes you more uptight. It is much better to be a bit loose, relaxed. When your mind arrives at the object of contemplation, just leave it alone; let it go. Don't worry; just contemplate.

You know what Zen masters say: "When you cut, cut; when you cook, cook; when you eat, eat." That's good. When you contemplate, contemplate. That's enough. Don't start thinking, "Great; my concentration is really good." It's superstition; it's no good. When your mind settles on the object of contemplation, loosen up; let it go.



But “loosen up” doesn’t mean be unaware. You have to maintain awareness; retain mindfulness. The connotation of “loose” and “let go” is when your mind is in the right channel, loosen it and let it go instead of thinking this and that, binding it with the rope of discursive thought.

Even if thoughts come, one after the other, most of them are objects; they’re not your subjective mind. No matter what those objects are, transform them into the divine, blissful, rainbow body of the deity and allow them to sink into you, the deity.

### *A Commentary on the Yoga Method of Divine Wisdom Manjushri*

*The following excerpts are from a commentary given by Lama Yeshe at Manjushri Institute, Cumbria, England, July 30 to August 12, 1977.*



*Lama Yeshe, 1978. Photo by Jon Landau.*



## Immeasurable Love and Immeasurable Equanimity

The four immeasurables are immeasurable equanimity, love, compassion and joy. I'll talk about just a couple of these.

The meaning of immeasurable, or limitless, love is clear from the words themselves. Fundamentally, we all have love; even animals have love. But the problem with our normal human love is that it's limited. We choose our love objects very selectively, whether they be other people or anything else. There are innumerable phenomena throughout the universe but we choose just a few favorite objects to love. This kind of fanatical love is actually a problem. Normally, we say love is always good. Its positive side can be good, but its extreme, narrow side is not. One reason it's a problem is that it gives us an extreme view of its object, where we exaggerate its good qualities. Another is that it gives rise to the symptoms of conflict that always arise from the dualistic mind. The inevitable reaction to fickle, narrow love is conflict and discomfort.

Take, for example, the Dharma student. When you first get into Buddhism, your love changes slightly in that it now becomes, "I love Buddhism; I love Dharma; I love Lama." Then it develops further in this direction: "This is really good. Before, I was down, but Buddhism has brought me right back up. Now I'm happy." Now you've really got a taste for Dharma. The problem is that every time you imprint, "This is good; this is good; this is good; Dharma good; meditation good," instinctively there arises the mind that thinks that anything that is not Buddhism is unimportant. Especially when you start studying philosophy and learn that there are aspects of other religions' philosophy that contradict what we believe in Buddhism, you start to put other religions down. You get to the point where you don't even like to hear the words Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and so forth.

That means you've lost your love. Instead of making you more tolerant and free, what you've been calling love has become a cause of conflict. I'm talking about love from the religious point of view. When you say, "I love Dharma," be careful that you don't love too much.

The point is that you should be using Dharma to solve your own problems, not create more. That's its only purpose. The function of Dharma is to become an antidote to your own problems. If your love of Dharma causes conflict in your mind, makes you more narrow and limits your communication such that you just want to ignore practitioners of other religions, your love's your problem.

The way your love becomes limitless is not through blind religious faith. It's not that someone tells you your objects of love are innumerable and you simply have to believe it. There's clear logic behind it. Say there's somebody whom you already love. Ask yourself why you love that person. Usually you'll reply that it's because that person's kind to you. That reason applies equally to all other sentient beings, but you should know all this from having studied the lamrim, so I'm not going to go into any more detail here. This is one of the reasons why understanding of the lamrim is a prerequisite to taking tantric teachings.

But don't take immeasurable love literally. Just because you love all sentient beings doesn't mean you have to give people whatever they ask for or sleep with everybody. True,

profound, universal love can be wrathful too. True love doesn't have to come with a smile; it can come with a frown. Our problem is that we interpret love too superficially. If people frown at us, we automatically assume they don't like us.

One Tibetan yogi said, "Evil friends don't necessarily look like scorpions." What he meant was that sometimes the people who are nicest to us are the worst for us. Scorpions are clearly dangerous, and their very appearance makes us afraid. But a person who strokes us lovingly on the arm, gives us gifts and whispers lovingly in our ear can be more dangerous than a scorpion. Such a person might even appear to be kinder to us than Lord Buddha. He was incredibly kind, but he never stroked our arm, gave us gifts or whispered in our ear. The false friend might demonstrate such superficial loving actions, but in the end will cheat us and ruin not only this life but also many lives to come.

We often find problems between parents and children. Most parents instinctively love their children, no matter what the children do. But when the children fail or do stupid things, the parents get worried. Sometimes their emotions and frustration manifest unskillfully as anger and aggression and the children think that their parents really hate them. They don't see the deep love behind the scolding. This is just another example where what's on the surface belies what's underneath.

I don't need to say anything about immeasurable compassion and joy, but I will make a couple of points about immeasurable equanimity. This way of equalizing all sentient beings is not the same as the communist ideal. It's completely different. But it looks as if the communists incorporated some of Lord Buddha's ideas into their politics, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say they dragged them through the mud. But taking profound philosophies into dirty, mundane, idealistic politics isn't going to work. You can't make everybody equal by force. Equality has to manifest from your consciousness. Equanimity is a state of mind, not an equal distribution of material possessions.

We should not be confused about this. Young people in the West these days are very idealistic. They get very excited when they hear that everybody should be equal. They feel that the West is too affluent and get quite emotional about the rich in particular. They're uncomfortable to start with, so the potential for explosion is there. Then when they hear this kind of philosophy, everybody should be equal, anger and jealousy erupt. They get angry at society, the government, the wealthy and almost everybody else. The idea of equality itself is good, but the question is, how to put it into action realistically? To do that, you need a lot of wisdom. It's difficult to put into action. The Chinese say they're communists but their society has many, many different classes and standards of living.

Therefore, don't be confused and go rushing about telling everybody that you heard this fantastic idea that all beings should be equal and start campaigning to make it happen. They'll lock you up. I'm not talking politics. Don't take profound spiritual truths that have to do with inner, mental development and interpret them on the physical level.

If you develop equanimity toward all sentient beings, you release all mental agitation. If you are extremely neurotic, if your consciousness is not fundamentally even, you'll find it impossible to direct your mind into single-pointed concentration. If you can't do that, it's very difficult to practice tantric yoga.

The extreme mind is a big problem. Lord Buddha had two brothers. One of them had unbelievable lust. He was always running after women. He was totally impossible. He was so overwhelmed with lustful hallucinations that there was no way that Lord Buddha could give him teachings. For example, say I'm in a nightclub with twenty girls, dancing and drinking, and you come up to me, "Hey, let me tell you some Dharma." I'm going to go berserk. Even if Lord Buddha himself wanted to give me teachings I'd tell him to leave me alone. It was like that. So he had to come up with another solution.

One day Lord Buddha showed this brother a vision of another realm. It was a hellish environment with flames and smoke all around, and in the middle there was a huge cauldron sitting on a big fire, bubbling with boiling oil and surrounded by fearsome protectors. Somebody asked what the cauldron was for and Lord Buddha's brother heard one of the protectors say, "Shakyamuni's brother is up there on earth, dancing, drinking and lusting his life away, but when he dies he's going to be reborn right here in this pot." He totally freaked out. Suddenly he comprehended what he'd been doing and what was going to result. He was so upset that he couldn't even eat. Then with his great skill, Lord Buddha manifested a vision of a beautiful, peaceful environment that was in complete equilibrium. No extreme suffering; no extreme happiness. That made his brother's mind very tranquil and even, and at that moment, Lord Buddha gave him teachings. As a result, he realized the emptiness of his own mind, released his ego and became an arhat.

Therefore, to practice the [Manjushri] yoga method, you need a firm foundation of equanimity so that you can control your mind and set it in the one direction. I can't stress enough how necessary this is. But if you can develop equanimity, you will find that state of mind itself extremely blissful. The dualistic mind is a mind of extremes—uneven and unbalanced. It's a painful mind. It's the psychological equivalent of constantly having a nail poked into you. The extreme mind is a complete hindrance to your developing the peaceful, blissful mind of equanimity.

## **Doing Two Things at Once**

In Lord Buddha's Mahayana tradition, we always emphasize the great importance of uniting method and wisdom in order to attain the highest realization of enlightenment. If you have only wisdom but not method, it's impossible to realize totality. Even in our daily lives we need both method and wisdom to keep our lives together. Without method, our daily lives reflect mental disorder. Intelligence alone is not enough.

It's important to be realistic and keep your lifestyle together. With intelligence, you can see what has to be done, but laziness and inaction prevent you from doing it. This is an example of a lack of method. Your wisdom can see what to do but you can't put it into action. This brings problems into your life. Instead of being orderly, harmonious and integrated, your life is disorderly, disjointed and fragmented.

Keeping your lifestyle together does not mean being rich, having a car and being materially well off in general. That's not what it signifies. It means that even if you have very few possessions, your room is tidy and comfortable—if you have just a few things and they are all over the place, the disorder reflects in your mind. Therefore, it's important to keep things

together. This is just a simple example but it's applicable to your Dharma practice. For inner development, to find liberation, you have to practice method and wisdom together.

Many times I hear Dharma practitioners blame their problems on their Dharma practice and complain that their Dharma practice does not help them. It's almost as if they're criticizing Dharma. When they get depressed, they question and criticize Dharma and have doubts about continuing their practice. The problem is not Dharma; the problem is that these people are confused. They don't know what Dharma is. That's why it doesn't help.

When we explain Dharma, we don't say that it's a material object. We don't say the dorje and bell are Dharma. If we did, then perhaps you could have doubts about how helpful it is for you. Thinking of Dharma in material terms is a misconception, but unfortunately it's fairly common.

Other people feel that their meditation doesn't help them. If that's how you feel, check how you're meditating. The thing is, no matter what you do, your experience is personal and unique. Don't put meditation up there while you're down here and then complain that it doesn't help like it used to. It doesn't help because you've created a gap between yourself and your meditation. The point I'm trying to make is that you must practice method and wisdom together.

You must also understand that the way method and wisdom are practiced in Paramitayana is very different from the way they're practiced in Tantrayana. If it were the same for both vehicles, tantra would be no faster or more powerful than sutra. Tantrayana and Paramitayana would then be the same.

In Paramitayana practice, the way method and wisdom are practiced together is alternately. Sometimes your consciousness is wisdom; at other times it's method. They are two different things. In tantric yoga, method and wisdom occur together in the same consciousness. This is difficult to explain and takes time to understand, but gradually you'll manage.

It's more difficult to put two things into the one space at the same time than to put them in two different spaces, so putting method and wisdom simultaneously into the one consciousness is also difficult. It's hard for the unintelligent mind to comprehend two things at once. The simple mind can comprehend two things one at a time but not both together. As we often say, "Tell me one thing at a time," or "I can't do two things at once." Therefore, if you want to practice tantric yoga, it means you're saying, "I'm intelligent enough to do two things at once."

## **Hinayana, Mahayana and the Meaning of Yana**

The entire Buddhist path to enlightenment can be divided into two *yanas*, the Hinayana and the Mahayana. Sometimes people refer to three *yanas* [and usually mean Shravakayana, Pratyekabuddhayana and the Mahayana—ed.]. They're not wrong, but generally we start with the two—Hinayana and Mahayana—and then subdivide the Mahayana into Paramitayana and Tantrayana, or Mantrayana. Thus, the Mahayana comprises two vehicles.

What is a yana? It's a vehicle—something that carries you from where you are to where you want to go; that leads you somewhere. Boats and airplanes are vehicles, but they're external vehicles. A yana is an internal vehicle, a mental attitude. For example, if you want to go to New York, the desire to be there is your vehicle; that's what leads you to New York. Similarly, a yana is that which leads you to your spiritual destination.

Actually, yana is easy to understand. We've been following some kind of vehicle since we were born. The desire to drink your mother's milk to preserve your body is a vehicle. This kind of desire allows your life to develop in an organic way. Getting an education, for example, is also a function of your vehicle.

When you follow the Hinayana, you are mainly concerned with solving your own problems. You want to liberate yourself from your own confusion, and understanding the root cause of your suffering, you enter this path of self-realization. We call this kind of attitude Hinayana.

When some people, academics, for instance, talk about Hinayana, they interpret it as some kind of second-rate philosophy. You'll often find books putting it down as a philosophical doctrine. That's a mistaken attitude. Now, look at us Tibetan Buddhists. We're always talking about Mahayana and bodhicitta, but if we were to check our minds closely, we'd find so much self-cherishing and “me, me, me, me, me” that—forget about calling ourselves Mahayanists—we wouldn't even qualify as Hinayanists.

Hinayana and Mahayana are not philosophy or doctrine. Of course, you can give philosophical interpretations of these paths, but their real meaning is psychological; they're to do with states of mind. Realization is not philosophy. Yana is not to be found in a book; yana is mental attitude. If you have tremendous concern for your own problems and an intense desire to free yourself from them completely and attain individual liberation, or nirvana, your attitude is Hinayana.

Things may not be as simple as we think. We believe we are following a spiritual path; we think we are meditators. But if we really check carefully, we will see that following the path to liberation is not an easy job. First and foremost, we have to understand what the root of samsara—cyclic existence, the wheel of life, death and rebirth—is.

Even in this life we do so many things to be happy but nearly always end up miserable. We go to the East seeking religion and end up miserable; we go to a center of this religion hoping to find relief and again end up miserable; we go to a center of that religion hoping it will solve our problems and end up miserable yet again. We run from one spiritual trip to another and always end up miserable. So we get fed up with religion and decide to be free, just like normal people are. We party, we go out drinking and dancing, we have this girlfriend, that boyfriend, one partner after another, but all we get is more and more confusion. This is samsara, the circle of endlessly substituting one sense object for another, never finding satisfaction; changing, changing, changing, but it's basically always the same thing.

Actually, we are like children. Children run from one thing to another, easily losing interest, easily distracted. We think children are, well, childish. But if we stop for a moment and cast a penetrating eye at our own trips, we'll see how childish we ourselves are. Forget about past

lives; forget about future lives; even in this life, how many trips have we been on? How many vehicles have we taken since we were born up until now? I can guarantee it's thousands upon thousands. And if you check honestly, you'll find that practically all of them have ended in disillusionment, with no satisfactory conclusion. What do I mean by satisfactory conclusion? I mean a clean-clear conviction, an indestructible determination that, "Yes, this is right for me."

But that's not us. We're like yoyos. We go to one religious center and the priest or guide or lama or yogi tells you that your philosophy is completely wrong and that his is the right way to think. So, you believe you're wrong and try to think his way. Then you go to another place, where they also tell you, "No, that way's wrong; you should think like this" and explain some other philosophy. Again you think, "Everything I just learned was wrong." You're tossed between right and wrong, wrong and right, and finish up more confused than ever.

Now you come to this Tibetan Buddhist center and hear that from a higher standpoint, not only the samsara trip is wrong but so too is the nirvana one. Going to a meditation course to hear a spiritual teacher talk about the path to liberation is supposed to be right, but we're saying it may not be. Again, it just adds to your confusion and you're no closer to a clean-clear conviction that you ever were.

To enter the Hinayana vehicle, the least you should have is a realization of renunciation of samsara. That's actually an incredible accomplishment. Someone who has realized renunciation of samsara is an object of refuge; someone to whom we should prostrate. It's very rare to find someone who has that realization. That's why when I explain the Hinayana path you should not think I'm putting it down. Reaching the level where you have entered the Hinayana path is a very high achievement.

I hope, then, that the meaning of yana is now clear. As I said, you can give doctrinal interpretations of the Hinayana and Mahayana paths. For example, certain Hinayana schools, like those in Thailand and Sri Lanka, require the monks to adhere to a very strict code of discipline. Monks cannot look women in the face and they certainly can't touch them, not even to shake hands. If a monk touches a woman, he has automatically broken a rule. In many ways, it's a good rule, but from the Mahayana point of view, it actually depends on the mind; it depends on the attitude with which you touch the woman. If you touch her with a mind of grasping attachment, the only result of which is more conflict in your mind, that's wrong. But if you touch her out of compassion, to benefit her in some way, we believe that that's not only acceptable but necessary.

Now, some people will look at these two teachings and conclude that Lord Buddha contradicted himself. One vehicle says no; the other says yes. There's no contradiction; it depends on the individual's mind. That's what's important. The consideration of individual need is a salient feature of Lord Buddha's teaching. That's why Buddhism accepts the validity of all other religions. We have no problem with Christians, Jews, Hindus or Muslims. We respect them all. We should respect them all. Different philosophies and doctrines are needed so that the widest possible variety of individuals can develop on the spiritual path. Different people have different levels of mind. The one path isn't going to suit everybody.



## Who are You and Where Can You Be Found?

One of the essential practices of tantra is that of deity yoga. When we practice tantra, we have to arise as the deity we're practicing. In order to do this properly, we need to experience a certain degree of non-duality. If we don't, we'll think that our arising as the deity is the same as arising as a flower or a wall. It will make no sense. In fact, there's incredible sense in arising as the deity and there's a vast difference between arising as a flower and arising as a deity.

It's essential to dissolve the normal ego projection of the physical nervous system body; to absorb the image that our conception of ego instinctively feels□ that I'm somewhere around here; Thubten Yeshe is somewhere here. Where is Thubten Yeshe? My ego's instinctive interpretation is that I'm here, somewhere in my body. Check for yourself. See what comes up in your mind when you think of your name. The huge mountain of your self will arise. Then check exactly where that mountain of "me" can be found. Where are you? Somewhere around your body. Are you in your chest, in your head?

You feel this instinctively. You don't have to study philosophy to learn it; you don't have to go to school; you parents didn't teach you. You've known this since before you were born. Buddhism describes two kinds of ego identity: *kun tag* and *lhen kye*. The one I'm talking about is *lhen kye*, the simultaneously born one; the one that exists simply because *you* exist. It was born with you; it needs no outside influence for its existence. Like the smell that comes with a pine tree, they're one. The pine tree doesn't grow first and then the smell comes later. They come together. It's the same with the innate sense of ego; it comes at conception.

*Kun tag* means the sense of self that's philosophically acquired. It's something that you learn through outside influence from teachers, friends, books and so forth. This is the intellectually derived ego. Can you imagine? You can even acquire an ego through reading. This one is easier to remove, of course, because it's more superficial. It's a gross conception. The simultaneously born sense of self is much, much harder to get rid of.

This instinctive conception of ego is really convinced that around my body is where you'll find Thubten Yeshe. Someone looks at me and asks, "Are you Thubten Yeshe?" "Yes," I reply, "I'm Thubten Yeshe." Where is Thubten Yeshe? Around here. Instinctively, I feel I'm right here. But I'm not the only one who feels like this. Check up for yourself. It's very interesting.

Until I was six years old, I was not Thubten Yeshe. That name was given to me when I became a monk at Sera Monastery. Before that time, nobody knew me as Thubten Yeshe. They thought I was Dondrub Dorje. The names Thubten Yeshe and Dondrub Dorje are different; different superstitions give different kinds of name. I feel my name is me, but actually, it isn't. Neither the names Thubten Yeshe nor Dondrub Dorje are me. But the moment I was given the name Thubten Yeshe, Thubten Yeshe came into existence. Before I was given the name, he didn't exist; nobody looked at me and thought, "There's Thubten Yeshe." I didn't even think it myself. Thubten Yeshe did not exist.

But when one superstitious conception named this bubble, my body□ "Your name is Thubten Yeshe"□ my superstition took it: "Yes, Thubten Yeshe is me." It's an

interdependent relationship. One superstition gives the name Thubten Yeshe to this bubble of relativity and my ego starts to feel that Thubten Yeshe really does exist somewhere in the area of my body.

The reality, however, is that Thubten Yeshe is merely the dry words applied to the bubble-like phenomenon of these five aggregates. These things come together and that's it: Thubten Yeshe, the name on the bubble. It's a very superficial view. The ego's instinctive feeling that Thubten Yeshe exists somewhere around here is very superficial.

You can see that the relative reality of Thubten Yeshe is simply the name that's been given to this bubble of energy. That's *all* Thubten Yeshe is. That's why the great philosopher and yogi Nagarjuna and the great yogi Lama Tsongkhapa both said that all phenomena exist merely in name. As a result, some early Western Buddhist scholars decided that Nagarjuna was a nihilist. That's a conclusion that could be reached only by someone who doesn't practice and spends all his time dealing in concepts and words.

If I were to show up somewhere and suddenly announce, "You're all merely names," people would think I was crazy. But if you investigate in detail the manner in which we're all merely names, it becomes extremely clear. Nihilists reject the very existence of interdependent phenomena but that's not what Nagarjuna did. He simply explained that relative phenomena exist but that we should view them in a reasonable way. They come, they go; they grow; they die. They receive various names and, in that way, gain a degree of reality for the relative mind. But that mind does not see the deeper nature of phenomena; it does not perceive the totality of universal existence.

Phenomena have two natures: the conventional, or relative, and the absolute, or ultimate. Both qualities exist simultaneously in each and every phenomenon. What I've been talking about is the way that bubbles of relativity exist conventionally. A relative phenomenon comes into existence when, at any given time, the association of superstition and the conception of ego flavors an object in a particular way by giving it a name. That combination—the object, the superstition giving it a name and the name itself—is all that's needed for a relative phenomenon to exist. When those things come together, there's your Thubten Yeshe. He's coming; he's going; he's talking. It's all a bubble of relativity.

If right now you can see that Thubten Yeshe's a bubble, that's excellent. It helps a lot. And if you can relate your experience of seeing me as a bubble to other concrete objects you perceive, it will help even more. If you can see the heavy objects that shake your heart and make you crazy as relative bubbles, their vibration will not overwhelm you. Your heart will stop shaking and you'll cool down and relax.

If I were to show you a scarecrow and ask if it was Thubten Yeshe, you'd probably say it wasn't. Why not? "Because it's made of wood." You'd have a ready answer. You can apply exactly the same logic to the argument that this bubble of a body is not Thubten Yeshe either.

I believe very strongly that this is me because of the countless times from the time I was born up to now that my ego has imprinted the idea "this is me" on my consciousness. "Me. This is me. This bubble is me, me, me." But this bubble itself is not Thubten Yeshe. We

know it's composed of the four elements. However, the earth element is not Thubten Yeshe; the water is not Thubten Yeshe; the fire is not Thubten Yeshe; the air is not Thubten Yeshe. The parts of the body are not Thubten Yeshe either. The skin is not Thubten Yeshe; the blood is not Thubten Yeshe; the bone is not Thubten Yeshe; the brain is not Thubten Yeshe. The ego is not Thubten Yeshe. Superstition is not Thubten Yeshe. The combination of all this is not Thubten Yeshe either□ if it were, Thubten Yeshe would have existed before the name had been given. But before this combination was named Thubten Yeshe, nobody recognized it as Thubten Yeshe and I didn't recognize it as Thubten Yeshe myself. Therefore, the combination of all these parts is not Thubten Yeshe.

If we call the scarecrow Thubten Yeshe and then analyze it to see exactly where Thubten Yeshe can be found, we can't find Thubten Yeshe in any of the parts or on all the parts together. This is easy to understand. It's exactly the same thing with the bubble of my aggregates. Neither any single constituent part nor the whole combination is Thubten Yeshe. We also know that the name alone is not Thubten Yeshe. So what and where is Thubten Yeshe? Thubten Yeshe is simply the combination of superstition flavoring an object with the words, "Thubten Yeshe." That's all that Thubten Yeshe is.

Beyond the name, there is no real Thubten Yeshe existing somewhere. But the simultaneously born ego doesn't understand that Thubten Yeshe exists merely as an interdependent combination of parts. It believes that without question, around here, somewhere, there exists a real, independent, concrete Thubten Yeshe. This is the nature of the simultaneously born ego. Therefore, if we do not remove conceptions like, "Somewhere in this bubble, I'm Thubten Yeshe," we cannot release the ego.

The conception of ego is an extreme mind. It holds very concretely the idea that somewhere within this bubble of the four-element combination body there exists a self-existent I. That is the misconception that we must release. If the ego mind assessed the situation reasonably and was comfortable and satisfied perceiving that superstition giving the name Thubten Yeshe to this interdependent, four-element bubble was enough for Thubten Yeshe to exist, that would be a different story. But it's not satisfied with that. It cannot leave that alone. It wants to be special. It wants Thubten Yeshe to be concrete. It's not satisfied with Thubten Yeshe being a mere name on a collection of parts. Therefore, it conceives an imaginary, unrealistic, exaggerated, concrete self-entity. The method we use to remove that conception is to transform our bubble of relativity into light.

## Visualization in Tantra

For your practice of tantric yoga to become a transcendent experience you need to recognize that phenomena are non-dual, non-self-existent and like magicians' illusions. Even your visualization of yourself as a meditation deity is an interdependent, relative phenomenon, the cooperative cause being your consciousness manifesting in that way.

Similarly, the emanations that we call Lord Buddha, the deity you practice or any other aspect of the enlightened mind are interdependent phenomena. Their cooperative cause is the *dharmakaya*; they are transformations, or reflections, of divine wisdom, the everlasting blissful consciousness of all enlightened beings.

Why are there all these different manifestations? It's because two cooperative causes—Buddha's wisdom and compassion—see, understand and manifest according to sentient beings' needs. The moment these things come together, the *dharmakaya* spontaneously manifests in the appropriate way; for example, as Manjushri, or any other deity you practice. It's effortless; the Buddha doesn't have to force himself in any way to manifest for the benefit of others.

Also, there's no distinction that your transformation into Manjushri is not real, whereas Buddha's manifestation as Manjushri is. One's as real as the other. Both are non-dual in nature; they come from the space of non-duality and disappear back into the space of non-duality.

It is very important to understand that Manjushri is a transformation, an emanation. Don't interpret Manjushri as a concrete self-entity. To help you avoid this, therefore, the entire evolutionary process of becoming Manjushri starts from the non-duality of shunyata. In due course, through the power of the experience of meditating on the rainbow body of Manjushri as an illusion, you'll be able to see all the energy of the entire sense world in the same way. And, if you meditate strongly enough, you might eventually be able to see the actual divine wisdom manifestation of Manjushri.

But even if you can't see it that way, you can still see it as an illusion. Actually, that's enough. Even seeing it in its non-dual nature as an illusion is extremely worthwhile.

Our qualm, of course, is that we think these visualizations are not real. Then, I'll ask you, what's real? *What is real?* As long as something functions, has an effect, does that make it real? No, it does not. Everything you do in your daily life—waking up, eating, talking, listening, coming, going—is like a dream. In many ways, there's no distinction between your experiences and feelings of doing these things while awake and doing them in a dream.

Every time you come and go, your experience is different. That shows that your physically walking here and there is an entirely dream consciousness experience rather than some kind of reality. In other words, what's more important is: what is reality for you? The reality of the sky; the reality of matter—vague, abstract questions as to the nature of reality—those things are irrelevant. What is a human being? What are the limitations of your conscious experience? These are the things that are real for you.

Now, because of your negative mind, more questions can arise. You doubt what I'm saying because, "It's not my experience." Then I'm going to ask you, "Is your experience limited or not?" You have to agree that it is. Then I'm going to come back with, "Can you put limitations on reality?" Absolutely not—you can't say that reality is limited. You can't presume to know reality; you can't say that your experience covers universal experience, that what's not your experience can't possibly exist.

I'm not criticizing your asking questions. What I'm criticizing is your rationalization, your rejection of reality for illogical reasons—your assumptions based on your own limited experience. It's much better to question things than to accept them blindly.

So, transforming your consciousness into the radiant light body of the deity you are practicing is very important in order to have a transcendent experience. You do have a psychic body. It doesn't matter whether you believe it or not. The reality is that it's there. Whether you believe you have a nose or not, there it is, on your face. Similarly, your psychic body is always there. It is your psychic, or conscious, body that you transform into the radiant light body. It is important to practice this at this time. In order to help them with such visualizations, some lamas set up a reflection of Manjushri in a mirror and think that the reflection is somewhere between them and the mirror and contemplate on that point. Then, when their contemplation is good, that Manjushri form sinks into them, they transform themselves into Manjushri, and contemplate on that.

We have such concrete conceptions. One is always one; two are always two; three are always three. Our ideas are fixed in that way. We meditate that two Manjushris manifest from the one; four from the two; hundreds from the four; billions from those. This type of skillful training makes our mind flexible. Then those billions all absorb back into one. This is mind training. It helps eradicate narrow, fixed, limited ideas. You, too, can train in this way. You can use the same methods that Tibetan lamas use.

## Monsters (Un)Incorporated

If you recognize non-duality, you'll have no fear. All fear and insecurity comes from not being realistic, from the wrong conception that holds fearful objects as concrete self-entities. A story from the life of Tibet's great yogi, Jetsun Milarepa, illustrates this point.

Once Milarepa left his cave to collect wood, and when he returned, he saw a terrifying face with big eyes glaring at him. It blew his mind. But he looked carefully at the face and meditated on it as illusory, and later wrote a song about this experience. By removing the conception that identified that horrible image as a concrete self-entity, it disappeared. This is not a fairy tale; this is a meditator's experience.

People scare themselves with thoughts of ghosts and demons. It is all superstition, the wrong conception believing in a self-entity. There's no such thing. But when you have a superstitious belief, for some reason it manifests. So you say, "It's real. I saw it." What you saw is important? That's completely ridiculous. What you see is absolutely unimportant. You need to know that. People in the West set incredible store by what they see; they really do believe that seeing is believing, that what they see is real. This basic misconception also engenders a kind of pride: "I saw that he is *this*, therefore, he is *this*." "I saw" makes your ego proud. This is a completely wrong conception.

What you see, what you experience, is not necessarily the truth. In fact, believing what you see to be real actually obscures the truth. Buddhist meditation demonstrates this. It is very important to know this. When you have a degree of flexibility, you will feel, "What I see is not that important. It is relatively true, but not ultimately."

If you believe that the relative truth is the only truth, your hallucinations must also be true, because they produce effects. They make you angry; they make you afraid. What you

perceive is not there, but that hallucination still makes your heart shake. It, too, is an interdependent phenomenon.

You say that your hallucinations aren't true and therefore don't matter, but what you see is real. In response, I say that they are equally real; both exist. Why? The thing that determines whether something exists or not, whether something is or is not a phenomenon, is whether it functions, produces an effect. Since both relative phenomena and hallucinations can cause you happiness or anxiety, they both function; therefore, they both exist. Both are interdependent phenomena. Until you realize the emptiness of a hallucination, it remains real for you.

Toward the end of certain tantric sadhanas is the practice of the samadhi of fire. While the fundamental basis of this meditation is seeing yourself as the deity, at this point you don't emphasize this part of the meditation as you did earlier in the sadhana. Your main focus is the fire feeling and the sound of the mantra in the fire. In this, you're like a fish swimming through water. Fishes swim through water without disturbing it. Similarly, your visualization of yourself as the deity should not shake your consciousness. Your contemplation is there, but it's kind of by the way and doesn't disturb your fundamental mind.

Signs of having accomplished this meditation successfully include enhanced physical energy whereby you don't feel hungry or thirsty, and the development of blissful heat energy. You feel an inner, liberated security that gives you confidence that you could go for long periods without eating or drinking, even when you're not in meditation.

Perhaps we could promote this meditation to people who want to lose weight, those who have the problem of, on the one hand, having an uncontrollable desire to eat and, on the other, tremendous fear of getting fat.

Another sign of success is enhanced sensitivity of the body, whereby everything feels blissful to the touch. Normally our limited conceptions are such that only a few, if any, objects induce a rapturous, blissful feeling. We never feel that touching plastic or cement could be blissful. Making this kind of distinction is again a function of our superstitious, dualistic mind. Our dualistic mind tells us that soft things feel good and rough things feel bad, but the psychological truth is that every object of touch has the potential to induce bliss and satisfaction. When our mind is satisfied, it doesn't wander.

Why does our mind generate superstition and wander so much when we try to meditate? Because we are dissatisfied; because we're devoid of blissful experience, of not having the satisfaction of fulfillment or totality. Our mind wanders, crying with superstition, "I'm not satisfied, I'm hungry." All this psychological crying is symptomatic of superstition.

The methods of tantric yoga show us that every object of the five senses can give us a blissful experience so that every time we enjoy the sense world we get blissful energy. The result of this is that our concentration improves. Therefore, it's important to have blissful experiences.

This seems to be the total opposite of what you always hear in the lamrim teachings, where you're always being told you should not enjoy samsara. It's completely different, isn't it? The

lamrim almost makes you feel guilty if you enjoy yourself. Now I'm telling you to enjoy yourself as much as you possibly can, to have as many blissful experiences as possible. However, these two things are not in contradiction. I'm talking about completely different kinds of experience.

When you're practicing lamrim, at that stage your mind has no training in the method of transcendence. Tantra, however, teaches you how to elevate your consciousness beyond the ordinary kind of sense pleasure that produces only more grasping and confusion. Your concentration and mindfulness allow you to do all these activities in the space of non-duality, recognizing them as the transformation of blissful wisdom. Thus, samsaric enjoyment and tantric enjoyment are entirely different.

Now you understand the philosophy. The more blissful experiences you enjoy with mindfulness, the greater your psychological satisfaction. The greater your satisfaction, the less your superstition, the less your mind wanders, the less you look around: "Maybe I'll find happiness here, maybe I'll find happiness there," constantly seeking, seeking, seeking.

I appreciate the young hippies of today. They're not satisfied with their home, culture or country, so they travel the world, seeing what they can find. They look here, they look there, seeking, wandering, and eventually, some of them come to the East. There they find dysentery and hepatitis, but also meditation courses and Dharma teachings. But that's a good result. Usually, your superstitious mind is like the wind that blows leaves aimlessly, here and there. You don't know where you're going or why and you never find any kind of reality.

When you're having trouble concentrating—objects of superstition arising one after the other without control—you have to deal with that superstition gradually. You can't stop it all at once, just as, if you're in New York, you can't be in Los Angeles the moment you think of it. You can't intellectualize it; it takes time. You have to accept the reality of space and time. The same applies to meditation. You can't get rid of superstition in one session, so don't worry. Accept reality. "That's meditation."

## **Realizing the Dharmakaya**

The way we explain a yoga method is as follows. First we explain the qualifications that students need in order to receive the method and those that teachers need in order to give the initiation. Then we explain how students can keep their body, speech and mind pure and going in the one direction. Then we give the initiation and commentary and explain how to do retreat and what kind of realizations students can expect and how to gain them.

When we practice the yoga method, first we do the transcendent process of transformation, doing the absorption and then arising as the deity. Then we contemplate on the divine body of the deity and gradually reach the point of mantra recitation, where there are many different concentration techniques we can apply.

With certain deities these include techniques of mental recitation, such as the samadhi of fire and the samadhi of sound, where our concentration gets ever more subtle as we approach



discovery of the dharmakaya, which is the essence of the buddha-mind, the totally open consciousness, the blissful state of universal wisdom.

In order to realize the dharmakaya we have to make a connection between it and our own fundamental experience. We have to create a link. It's like shooting a gun—you have to have a target. When we meditate, we have to focus our energy on the dharmakaya, so there needs to be some kind of logical relationship between what we are practicing and the goal, the dharmakaya.

Therefore, we first transform our consciousness into the rainbow body and then transform our consciousness into sound. Then that too disappears into non-duality. By contemplating on that kind of deep experience—our wisdom contemplating on only the tiny, subtle object of sound and that subtle object of sound also disappearing—our wisdom is left embracing empty space. That helps us eliminate our dualistic mind and brings us closer and closer to the dharmakaya.

Beginners always have trouble holding the object when they first try to develop concentration and often get upset when it disappears: “I’m a terrible meditator; my concentration is so bad.” Don’t be discouraged. When the object disappears, you’re left with a kind of non-duality. Take advantage of that. Take that opportunity to bring yourself closer to the dharmakaya experience.

However, I’m not talking about your losing the object through sluggishness, through falling asleep. That’s no good at all. It’s when you’re trying to practice mindfulness but just can’t keep the object in mind. At that time, when the object—the sound, the deity, whatever it is—disappears, that’s OK. Just stay in the space of non-duality.

We have to develop gradually. Actually, to practice the last technique I mentioned, samadhi of sound, we’re supposed to have already attained the realization of calm abiding. What degree of concentration do you need to have attained before you can say you have realized calm abiding? You need to be able to meditate for twenty-four hours non-stop, without interruption, distraction, sluggishness or falling asleep. Some people find attaining this easy; others find it difficult. It’s a highly individual experience. You can’t ask, “How long does it take to attain calm abiding?” Some people can do it in a couple of months; others can take a year or more. It depends on the individual.

If you have that realization, that’s excellent. But even if you don’t, by doing retreat you will develop a certain degree of control over your mind; some ability to put it in whatever direction you want and keep it there. That’s very useful.

## **Appearance and Illusion**

Tibetan texts on tantric yoga sometimes say that you should see whatever appears to your sense perception as the rainbow light body of the deity that you’re practicing—clean clear in nature, non-substantial, non-dual, a reflection of the wisdom of totality, a transformation of absolute wisdom. This is what we practice, what we try to experience.

When you do experience this - the blissful rainbow body that is a transformation of the totality of absolute wisdom - when you have contemplated this enough, you see the sense world as illusory, in the way that a magician's illusions do not exist as they appear to ordinary perception. When you have developed this understanding, even during session breaks, instead of appearing concrete, the outer, sense world appears as an illusion.

Of course, an illusion is also a type of manifestation; illusions exist. You can't look at an illusion of a monkey conjured up by a magician and say that it doesn't exist, that it's not a phenomenon. It is a phenomenon; it's just not a real, relative monkey. It's still energy; it's still some kind of phenomenon; it's still reality.

Why do we say that the phenomena of the sense world appear to us as illusory? An illusion is something that does not exist in the way it appears; it's not real. It's a false vision; it gives us a false impression. It is misleading to believe in and follow it. Similarly, if we don't see the objects of the sense world as illusions, in fact, if we believe the opposite, that these phenomena are real, dualistic, concrete entities, we are misled.

Why are all these relative conceptions, movements and energies illusory? Because in appearance they seem to be real, whereas in reality, they are something else. The universal reality of all relative existence is something else; therefore, it is like an illusion.

Saying that relative existence is like an illusion is not just some philosophical fabrication. Nor does it mean that you lose your sense of proportion or your ability to discriminate and that everything gets all mixed up, like soup. It means that you see the phenomena of the sense world as an illusory bubble, simultaneously recognizing that these dualistic manifestations are actually non-dual in nature; they are born from the space of insubstantial non-self-existence and disappear back into it.

What is the psychological effect of seeing all this as an illusion? This wisdom is the antidote, or the solution, to the extreme mind. For example, in the morning, for some reason, you might be extremely happy. Some bubble of excitement appears, you perceive and believe it and think, "Oh, fantastic! I'm happy." You feel incredibly overestimated happiness. By receiving the relative bubble hallucinated vision of perhaps one chocolate from some bubble man or woman, you feel an incredible, extreme explosion of happiness. In the terminology of Buddhism, such extreme happiness is negative. It's too uncontrolled. Its nature, its function, its effect is to bring you down. So, in the morning, some bubble like that appears, and you're interested. In the afternoon, nothing happens, so you're bored. Your mind comes down; further and further down.

All our dealings with the relative world, all our up and down, being happy, unhappy, happy, unhappy, happy, unhappy, all these extreme feelings come from mistaken, dualistic perception, from holding ecstatic, happy objects and miserable, unhappy objects as concrete, self-existent, dualistic self-entities.

Beauty exists. I'm not saying that we have to reject beauty. What should concern us, however, is the way our projection of concreteness, independence and self-existence onto the relative bubble of transience, dependence and non-self-existent overpowers, overwhelms and dominates our entire reality.

How do you perceive that object of happiness or that object of misery? If you see it as illusory and non-dual, extreme feelings that pump you up so that there's no space for other feelings cannot function. You have no unequal, unbalanced energy.

If we can recognize the unity of the absolute reality of these two extreme objects, if we can see how these objects are in reality equal in nature - and also in nature with ourselves, the subject - our lives will be balanced.

For example, in the morning you give your friend a chocolate: "Thank you so much; I'm so *happy*!" She's extremely up. In the afternoon you're busy doing something else and don't have time to give her a chocolate; she's completely down. How can you handle that type of relationship? How can you keep it going? It's impossible, isn't it? You want to have a good relationship with that person but her psychologically extreme qualities make it impossible for you to maintain balance. Of course, it's difficult for her, too.

This is common. We've all had such experiences. In life, we get involved with different people. With some of them it's impossible to communicate well and maintain good relationships because they're so up and down.

Therefore, we need to keep repeating Lord Buddha's mantra, TADYATHA OM MUNÉ MUNÉ MAHAMUNAYÉ SOHA. That's why I always say TADYATHA OM MUNÉ MUNÉ MAHAMUNAYÉ SOHA. That's why at the beginning of each teaching I like to chant TADYATHA OM MUNÉ MUNÉ MAHAMUNAYÉ SOHA. That's the answer.

You must relate your understanding of Dharma to your everyday life. For example, you always hear about the eight worldly dharmas. These eight extremes arise from the unbalanced, dualistic mind, the belief in concrete self-existence within the sense world. Such belief only makes the eight worldly dharmas stronger.

If you have realized the reality of non-self-existence, if somebody praises you, prostrates to you or anoints you with perfume while another criticizes you, complains about you or even beats you, you have the space to maintain balance. Why is there space? Have you no mind? Are you out of your mind? Have you lost all feeling? Are you no longer human? Western intellectuals might question me like this. No□ you have universal consciousness. What you have lost is the attitude of fanatical, extreme, dualistic grasping. That mind has disappeared.

We lamas have a technique for practicing this kind of detachment. You look at your reflection in a mirror and imagine two people, one hurling insults at the you in the mirror, the other praising and trying to please your reflection as much as possible. As you might expect, the you in the mirror pays attention to neither of them. Now, you're going to argue that of course the reflection doesn't respond; it has no mind. There's no reason for it to be happy or unhappy. But this is not an exercise in logic; this is the lamas' scientific technique for training our minds to overcome the eight worldly dharmas. Try it out for yourself; you'll see that it works.

However, where there's no dualistic mind, there's no extreme view. When you discover that all your up and down happiness and unhappiness comes from your unbalanced mind, no matter how much people heap praise or criticism upon you, you are not swayed by your

emotions. You remain balanced. If you ever find yourself shaking with emotion, try to remember that it's because you're projecting a dualistic self-entity into whatever magic bubble is upsetting you and holding that hallucination to be real; that this is what's making you unbalanced. Try to recognize that your conception is mistaken; that your belief that the hallucination is true is wrong. When you realize and experience this, you will eliminate all your extreme, unequal feelings.

Let's look at this simply. Last year you saw something that caught your interest. When you bring it to mind today, it seems to be exactly the same as it was last year. The same applies even if it was ten years ago that you saw it. Not only years—even if it was lifetimes ago, you can still recollect it, “So nice; so good.” You can't forget it; it comes back again and again. Now, is the way you perceive the reality of this object whose memory keeps coming back from so long ago realistic or not? Of course, it's completely unrealistic.

If I were to ask you intellectually if that object is the same now as it was back then, you'd tell me that that's impossible. All objects are impermanent; they're constantly changing. Your logic would be crystal clear on this point. But the conception in your memory is of the object as it was back then: solid and unchangeable. That's the one you keep remembering. You can see how this is wrong.

This is especially true if the object is something organic, like a person or a flower. If it's something like concrete, superficially at least, it appears longer lasting. But we can see organic things constantly changing; their impermanence is readily apparent. Therefore, it's impossible for them to retain over the years the same qualities that appealed to you originally. But even though we assent to this intellectually, beneath the intellect, in our subconscious, the memory of those objects as we first saw them keeps on coming. It's completely unrealistic, and our extreme overestimation gives us an unbalanced memory of them. This is just an example, but our view is just as extreme with every other object that bring us happiness and unhappiness. It comes from ego and is like an illusion; *like* an illusion.

Why am I going on and on about this? No matter how many words I speak, talk can never equal experience. Words are still imitation; artificial, compared to experience.

Therefore, it's very important to train your mind skillfully. Don't push; don't squeeze yourself. Seeing reality has to come naturally; you can't force it. If you squeeze too much, again, there's no space.

Sometimes you see the Tibetan term “mind training.” I don't know what your connotation of training is; what impression you get. Perhaps you think it's some kind of pumping. Don't interpret it that way. You don't have to pump yourself. Train your mind to *see* reality; *feel* reality, gently, naturally, skillfully.

When you dream, you again hold concrete, dualistic conceptions. Those wrong conceptions are strong and you believe them to be true. In your dream, there's no space for you to recognize your dream as a dream. When you wake up, you can remember how real it felt. Sometimes you can tell a friend about a dream so enthusiastically that someone who overhears you talking thinks you're describing events that really happened, and is surprised

to find out that it was only a dream you were talking about. If, instead of being completely intoxicated by the misconception and holding on to your concrete imagination of subject and object, you can learn to recognize a dream as a dream while you are dreaming, even if you are having a terrifying dream, you will not be afraid.

This is great psychology. If, in our constant daily dealings with the world and other people, we can maintain recognition of all relative concepts and energy movement, whether they be happy or unhappy, as an illusion, as a dream, we will be liberated. In a sense, things are like illusions, like a dream, in that they do not exist in the way that our superstition projects. If we can realize that, we will be liberated, balanced.

Some people are incredibly happy one day, laughing all the time, almost uncontrollably, and completely miserable the next, not even a smile. I've seen many people like that, completely up and down. It shows that they're unbalanced.

I'm not saying that laughter is wrong. It's a dependent arising that depends totally upon a cooperative cause. The moment the cooperative cause manifests, one relative funny little bubble comes along, you laugh. That's fine. But extreme laughter is a symptom of something wrong. Extreme laughter, extreme happiness, severe mood swings, up and down - the key is in the person's mind. Not all laughter is good.

## **The Diamond of All Existence**

The experience of totality opens you up psychologically and gives you space to develop your great potential. Otherwise, you're suffocated by the heavy smog of duality; squeezed; oppressed. Your great potential is obstructed.

Therefore, this experience is important. But it is very different from the philosophy. When we talk about emptiness philosophically, there's no such thing as the relative world disappearing. You don't say that your nose has disappeared; it's still there. If someone asks you if your nose is non-existent, you can't say yes. Your nose exists. If you say your nose is non-existent people will freak out. They'll think you're a crazy nihilist; that you don't accept reality.

When we talk philosophically, we accept all phenomena in the bubble of relativity. We don't deny the existence of our nose or other existent things. They have a cause; they have an effect; and they all manifest from the space of non-duality, as we've been talking about. They come and they go. Because of non-duality they can move freely, grow freely and disappear freely. It's natural. This is the law of the universe. It's not my law; it's not some Himalayan law. The law of the universe is scientific reality, not some kind of made-up fantasy, and it is extremely important that you discover it for yourself.

When you do, you will understand how the dark shadow of ignorance keeps the pitiful mother sentient beings in confusion; how sentient beings are suffering because they have not discovered the clean, clear, pure energy of universal reality. This is what they lack. Buddhism strongly emphasizes that universal non-duality is like cheesecake, or chocolate; we always assert that non-duality is the best phenomenon in the world. All Lord Buddha's sutras

indicate that non-duality is the heart essence of every phenomenon in the universe. It is incredibly valuable; the diamond of all existence. This is explained over and over again. It is such an important point. That's why throughout the entire canon of his teachings, Lord Buddha says again and again, "Sometimes I advise people to do this; sometimes I recommend that. I tell people all kinds of things. But the sole purpose of every syllable, every letter, of every method I teach is to lead them to discover the reality of the universe, shunyata."

Everything Lord Buddha said, every single movement he made was, in essence, a method of leading mother sentient beings to discover universal reality.

These days, in the West, we hear a lot about the open heart, about opening your heart. This is common. From the Buddhist point of view, in order to open your heart, you have to realize something. "I want to open my heart, but how?"—this is the question. Opening has to do with realization; no realization, nothing opens. It doesn't matter that you say, emotionally, "I'm open. I love you; you love me so much." That doesn't mean you're open. We do that kind of thing, don't we? "No matter how much I open myself up to you, you never open yourself up to me." It's a joke. It's not true.

Well, perhaps it's true in one sense, but actually, true openness implies space—your consciousness embracing some kind of wide totality. This experience of embracing totality itself becomes the solution, or antidote, to the narrow, fanatical, conceptualizing dualistic mind.

But then there's the danger of the attitude, "Wow! Universal reality is incredibly special," arising. We get the impression that shunyata is a really special, fantastic phenomenon. This attitude is wrong. Instead of, "Oh, non-duality is special, up there; the ordinary, relative bubble of samsara is down here," which is completely wrong, our position should be more realistic: whenever there's the appearance of the bubble of relativity, we should simultaneously see non-duality within it.

When we're in a conducive environment, we find meditation easier; because we're free of the vibration of the conflict of duality. When we're out and about, in contact with the objects of the bubble of relativity, our heart immediately begins to shake; sense objects make uncontrolled energy run rampant within us. Because we don't see the non-duality of universal reality within the bubble of relativity, our reactions to objects in the sense world are fragmented. If we could see reality, we wouldn't shake every time there was a change in our external environment.

Why, when the environment changes, does your behavior change immediately as well? You know, I like talking about this. For me, this is much more realistic than talking philosophy. So, why do we change like that? Well, look at what happens to you here. As soon as you leave the meditation hall and go into the dining room, you manifest as something else completely. You're almost another person. Why? Because you differentiate between deepest, essential nature of the meditation hall and that of the dining room. If you could see universal reality of these two rooms—and essential reality is non-differentiated; it has a unified quality—you would not change so easily. You see, we are completely intoxicated by the

dualistic mind; the dualistic mind completely overwhelms us. The vibration of each different environment too easily influences us. We think we're in control; we're not in control.

When I look at a lovely flower, I'm too influenced. I'm intoxicated by it. When I look at something else, that, too, intoxicates me. I'm completely dominated by my dualistic mind; I have no control. I'm completely influenced by the external world and from my own side, am totally helpless. We're all the same—we're constantly under the influence of whatever we see and hear outside. It's incredible. The dualistic, relative mind intoxicates us, while our wisdom realizing universal reality is in a deep sleep. Now is the time to reveal and activate that wisdom.

Our dualistic mind is so rigid. As soon as the environment changes, our reality changes. While we're here at the center, it's all Dharma. When we go into town to have fun, the sense world bubble of the dance club becomes our reality. Why am I taking this negative approach? Because it's more realistic. This is our experience. If I just talk abstract philosophy, you can't relate because it's not your experience. I like to talk about experience. Why, when the environment changes, does your reality change? That's all I'm asking.

You must really understand this yo-yo mind. The yo-yo mind is always up and down, and that's how you spend your whole life—going up and down. The relative environment changes automatically; there's no unchangeable environment. So as the relative bubble of your external environment constantly changes, your reality constantly changes, and you really believe that this is this and that is that. You have no universal understanding. That's what makes you and all other sentient beings suffer.

And that's why visualization is powerful. Your environment is visualization. The things you see and feel are your visualization. "I saw it, I felt it; therefore, it's real." That's what you say. What other logic do you have? You saw, you felt; that's it. What other scientific proof for its reality do you have? None.

This is the reason for our saying that at the beginning of your practice, you need a conducive environment. When you reach higher levels of development, perhaps then you can say that your consciousness is your temple, your consciousness is your church, but until then, when you are starting out, you are too easily influenced by the bubble of relativity and intellectual concepts; you are overwhelmed and dominated by the vibration of your visualization of the external world. Therefore, you need to develop your mind until you reach the point where you can see that in fact, reality does not change at all.





*Lama Yeshe, 1977.*

## ***We Should Not Be Afraid of Death***

*Lama Yeshe gave this public lecture at the Ethnographic Museum, Stockholm, Sweden, September 8, 1983.*

I've been asked to speak on the Tibetan Buddhist view of death and rebirth, but before I get into that, I'd like to say a little about life. From the Buddhist point of view, life is the combination of body and mind. However, even though body and mind are related to and depend upon each other, they have quite different characteristics.

With respect to the body, we recognize two types: gross and subtle. Similarly, mind can also be divided into gross and subtle. When it comes to the continuity of life after death, it is not the gross body and mind that continue but the subtle.

Now, every human being, each of us, has within us a pure level of consciousness. At the same time, we have a mind that is contaminated by various negative thoughts. Therefore, we all have access to our pure, clean-clear state of mind, but along with that we also have to deal with its negative aspects.

Of course, sometimes our egotistic, intellectual negative thoughts are too strong, too overwhelming, and at such times it seems impossible to be happy and clean clear. When that happens, we need to recognize that what we are seeing is not our basic human nature but a sort of artificial, polluted version of ourselves. We have to know that the fundamental human nature is pure, not totally negative, and that those seemingly uncontrollable, confused thoughts are just like dark clouds in a clear blue sky.

Not only that. We also have to understand that such thoughts are impermanent. They come; they go. Merely recognizing the impermanence of our negative thoughts allows us to destroy them as soon as they arise. In other words, the Buddhist point of view is that human problems such as anxiety and other emotional disturbances are temporary. We can overcome them. We ourselves have the power to change them rather than having to rely on Buddha or God. We have the power to change and overcome miserable conditions because we ourselves made them.

And that's why the main emphasis of Buddhist education is on the mind. The main focus of Western education seems to be on the body, and we forget about the mind ... unfortunately! The nuclear essence of human life is not the body; it's the mind. It's the quality of mind, not body, that determines whether our life is happy or unhappy. Still, genetically it seems that the Swedish body is pretty healthy, but for me, the Swedish mind is still a question. I'm only a tourist, so I can't tell yet!

As you know, Buddhism always talks about karma. Karma is your attitude, your quality of mind, and it's this that mainly determines your quality of life, whether it's happy or miserable. Karma is the key. This applies whether you believe in religion or not. If your attitude is positive, your life will be happy. If your attitude is negative, you'll be unhappy. It has nothing to do with belief. If you have a yo-yo attitude, your life will be up and down no matter what you believe.

Nowadays many people think, "I don't experience good or bad because I don't believe anything." That's a wrong attitude. Whether or not they believe they have a body and a mind is irrelevant—their body and mind are always there. Perhaps somebody thinks he doesn't exist but that doesn't matter; he exists and experiences suffering like everybody else. Similarly, some people think that nothing will happen after they die, but when they become a monkey or a tiger in their next life, then what? Saying that you don't believe anything doesn't mean that you're intelligent.

Well, be all that as it may, what Buddhism offers society is the knowledge that human beings can liberate themselves from problems and miserable situations by simply changing their mind. Anybody can do this. But although humans have developed intellectually and learned much about gaining pleasure and happiness, from the moment we're born, consciously or unconsciously, we're constantly seeking and grasping for more and more. That's how we're contaminated—we're unable to abide in a natural state of mind.

As you also know, Buddhism stresses the importance of meditation, which is a method for bringing the mind into a natural, clean, calm, peaceful state. Every human being has the ability to accomplish this. Anybody can do it. It's a natural thing.

For example, when you go to sleep at night, all the intellectual garbage that has occupied your mind during the day, all your anxiety and confused thoughts, slowly, slowly dissipate and you gradually approach a natural state of mind. In fact, every night when you're asleep you touch that natural, clean-clear state, but because you're unconscious you don't notice it. We're not dead when we're asleep. We're still alive, still breathing, still absorbing oxygen, but it's very light, very slow, very gentle. So, without our noticing, our mind reaches a clean-clear

point. When we're asleep we don't have any emotional grasping for chocolate. Our sense-grasping mind completely slows down. It's like we're meditating!

If we find ourselves in a confused, mentally exhausted state, sometimes it's good just to go to sleep because when we awaken, our mind will, to some extent, have become clean clear. It's natural; it's human nature. That's why Western doctors sedate agitated people. It slows their nervous system down.

## The Experience of Death

First, we should not be afraid of death because from the moment we were born we've been destined to die. There's no way out. Sometimes people get angry when they're asked how old they are: "That's none of your business!" But even though getting old is natural, it often makes Western people upset.

Dying, too, is natural and, as we know, it can be a gradual experience. It can also be a blissful experience, although most people regard it as something fearful. That's a wrong attitude. Our body is composed of the four elements of earth, water, fire and air, and in the course of a natural death, these four elements gradually disintegrate. We also have five *skandhas*, or aggregates—form, feeling, discrimination, compositional factors and consciousness. At the time of death, these too sequentially deteriorate, or lose power.

What first happens when we die is that the form skandha, the essence of our body, begins to disintegrate and we feel as if we are being buried under a great pile of dirt. The concomitant dissolution of our earth element causes us great confusion, as do the forthcoming dissolutions of the other skandhas and elements. Therefore it is very important to educate people and ourselves as to what happens during the death process so that we know what's coming and can understand that it's just a mental projection. In that way we can die without fear and confusion. In this first cycle our eye sense also dissolves and our eyesight becomes unclear. The internal sign is a mirage-like vision.

Next, the skandha of feeling disintegrates and we lose all sense of pain and pleasure. We also lose our hearing. Our body becomes just like a dead banana! Along with this our water element dissolves. The internal sign is an appearance of smoke.

Third, our fire element and skandha of discrimination disintegrate and we can no longer remember the names of our mother, father, husband, wife, children or other family and friends. We also lose our sense of smell. Our inhalation becomes weak and our exhalation lengthy. The internal sign is that of sparks of fire. These internal signs are not observed by our eye sense consciousness but are mental projections, manifestations of our more subtle consciousness and akin to dreaming.

So you can see, during the death process, as in life actually, nobody is creating problems for you other than yourself. All your anxiety, emotional hatred, desire and so forth come from within yourself. At this time, however, your delusions naturally slow down and gradually disappear.

In the fourth cycle our air element deteriorates and our breathing stops altogether. At this point all our ego problems naturally disappear. This is not as a result of practice; it's just natural. It is here that meditators take the opportunity of meditating on the fundamental nature of universal reality. By contemplating on it more and more they can begin to gain direct experiences of it.

I want to make one thing very clear here because Western preconceptions are very strong regarding this—from the Buddhist point of view, even though externally breathing seems to have stopped and it would appear to be the moment of clinical death, a subtle breath remains inside. The person is not yet completely dead. This explanation conflicts with baby Western science. Western science is very young and its opinion on this is very dangerous because, at this stage of the death process, the person is still alive and can survive for a long time in the subtle body with subtle breathing, which is not observable from the outside.

As you know, India is a very hot place and refrigerators for corpses are few and far between. So they tend to burn bodies within hours of what they consider to be death. I heard that once someone was being burned and when his body was half burned, he sat up and cried, "Please don't burn me, I'm not dead!" This is human experience. I'm not talking religion here. Don't think that this is some Buddhist projection. Ordinary people saw this.

Similarly, I heard of a case in France where a non-religious man was declared dead by doctors but awoke after a couple of hours. He wrote a quite well-known book describing his experience of being dead for two hours. Again, this is human experience, not something influenced by Buddhist or religious philosophy.

## **Our Natural State**

The essence of our nervous system is the 72,000 psychic channels we have running through our body. There is a large central channel, slightly smaller right and left psychic channels running alongside it, and then the others branch and sub-branch off those. At certain points along the central channel are energy centers, or chakras, which, during life, are normally closed. At the time of death they open and our mental energy enters and flows through our central channel. This is what allows experienced meditators to meditate on emptiness at this stage of the process.

Because our energy normally flows in the wrong direction, we experience wrong pressures in our life. Correct meditation—focused concentration—can reverse this and help our energy flow in the right direction. But at the time of death we don't have to make this kind of effort. Our energy naturally flows in the right direction. From the time we were born up to the time we die we've been accumulating wrong conceptions and superstitions, all the time thinking good and bad, all these dualistic concepts, so by the end of our life we're like full garbage bags stuffed with rubbish. During the death process all this completely disappears and we experience some kind of universal reality, infinite space, the true nature of ourselves and all other existent things.

To be in our natural state is to touch reality. Therefore it's important for all of us to recognize that we have access to our natural state instead of constantly pushing ourselves

into an artificial one. We have to analyze what's best. Is it valuing an artificial life full of emotion and intellectualization or abiding in our natural state?

Most of the time we think, "I have to use my intellect, I feel I should be clever." Being clever is easy. Cut your throat and die. It's better not to be that kind of clever; it's better to be ignorant. At least you won't commit suicide.

## Completing the Death Process

Anyway, to get back to the death process, after our breathing stops we experience three visions. The first of these is the white vision. This has nothing to do with our physical eye sense, which is already a dead banana. It's an inner, mental experience. Because all our crowded, intellectual, ego-grasping superstitions have stopped, we suddenly reach a point of infinite space, or sky. The impression in our mind is of a calm, clear blue sky, a clear mental experience of completely infinite blue space that appears to our subtle consciousness as a white light vision.

From that experience our mind again moves to infinite blue sky in which there now appears a red light vibration. Then that suddenly stops and everything goes black. Finally, this black vision slowly clears and we again experience infinite universal space and a fourth vision, that of clean clear light. In this there are no concepts, no value judgments, no classifications and no division of anything into good and bad.

Some meditators can remain in the clear light meditation for many days. Even if you are not a meditator you stay there a little while. Even if you don't believe you're in a clean-clear state, you stay in the clear light state of consciousness anyway. Sometimes we refer to it as the dharmakaya experience. Actually there's a bit of a debate about this. Some meditators say that everybody experiences universal reality. Others say that it's not exactly that but similar.

## The Intermediate State

When the clear light vision stops our consciousness finally separates from our body and passes into the intermediate state, the *bardo*. Because the clear light was so bright, when it stops, passage into the bardo is experienced as darkness. Then we're in the bardo for a while and when it's time to go into the next life we go through the three visions in reverse: the dark vision, the red vision and the white vision. After that, in our next life, all our worldly superstitions and ego problems arise once more.

What is a bardo being? The bardo body is not material like ours. It's a sort of conscious body. It's very light and can pass through mountains and other solid things. Its only enjoyment is smell. It has no desire to eat chocolate. But it is full of confusion and superstition and is constantly seeking to come into the desire realm, grasping to enter a mother's womb.

A bardo being fortunate enough to be reborn human sees its future parents engaged in intercourse and its consciousness enters the father's central channel, passes down through it and enters the products of conception in the mother's womb. After that its development is exactly the same as contemporary science explains. Therefore, Western parents should not expect their children's minds to be the same as their complicated minds. The new generation also has its own generation gap, its own evolution and its own ignorant understandings. From the Buddhist point of view, every human being is completely different until we reach beyond the dualistic mind. Then everybody's mind is at the same level.

What I've been describing here is the evolution of a natural human death. This is Buddhism's scientific explanation of what happens to the human body and mind at death.

## **Your Future is in Your Hands**

Whether you believe in reincarnation or not, you do know that you have a body and a mind. You also know that your mind is the main problem, not your nose. Since you understand that clean clear, it's good to develop your understanding of the mind. This is very important for your life and for gaining the happiness you seek. And that's what Buddhism talks about: human problems and how to deal with them and the fact that each of us is individually responsible for our own happiness and misery.

The way to liberate yourself from the uncontrolled mind is to put an end to your small, narrow, nonsensical way of thinking and to recognize that you can change it and think something else. It's so natural. You don't have to grasp at belief in God or Buddha; it's just a humanistic thing. Even Western children know this. I once asked a young Italian boy what he did when he had problems. He said, "When I have problems I think about something else." If you ask adults that question, they'll have difficulty answering: "I wouldn't know what to do." I was very happy with the boy's reply. It was such a natural answer. Adults would be like, "Oh, Lama, it's so hard!"

OK, now, I don't like problems myself, so maybe I should talk about good things. The good thing is, if you have a pure attitude, loving kindness for others, you'll have no problems when you die. If you can recognize that any confusion you experience is just some kind of mental projection, you'll have no fear. If you see that it's just a trip and are able to deal with reality, there's no way that your dying experience will be dangerous.

Many people, consciously or unconsciously, are scared of what comes after death. If your mind is clean clear, if you have loving kindness for others and no self-cherishing, concrete concepts, you have nothing to worry about. Your future lives will get better and better.

Of course, if at death your mind becomes a crazy chicken or a crazy pig or a crazy snake, it's possible that you'll be reborn as a chicken, pig or snake. Unfortunately. But that's difficult for the Western mind. If you're born a young boy or girl—intelligent, clean clear—but as you get older you take drugs and get drunk a lot, your mind can become worse than bananas. This is not something made up by Tibetans or Buddhists. It's part of your culture. Don't think, "I'm beautiful. How can I become an ugly pig?" You might have been a beautiful teenager but in your old age your good looks get completely destroyed. You can see that. It's



the same with the mind. It can degenerate in the same way and then finish up entering such an undesirable body. It's very flexible.



*Lama Yeshe, Kopan Monastery, Nepal, 1974.*



## *A Last Letter from Lama Yeshe*

*This letter was written by Lama Yeshe in 1983 to his close friend Geshe Jampa Wangdu. Lama had been seriously ill for four months and by November 1983 it was obvious that his life was in danger. He passed away on March 3, 1984. The letter is translated by Gelong Jampa Gendun and Gelong Lobsang Jordan.*

Mindful of our root guru unequaled in kindness, king of great bliss, Heruka of the body mandala, crown ornament of the holders of the practice lineage of Ganden, I here pay homage to Trijang Dorje Chang and in doing so reply to your series of advices, my spiritual brother, Venerable Jampa Wangdu, which you sent with such great affection. I will avoid exaggerations and will write a reply reflecting the nature of the illusion-like dependent arising.

Due to my right and left channels being filled with the violent movement of thought-winds and overflowing out of control beyond the capacity with which my ordinary heart can cope, and in order to safeguard myself from this, I was forced to place this “difficult-to-find body of leisure and endowments” in the hands of a strange doctor. Upon examining me for half an hour, he advised that I must definitely go into the intensive care unit of the hospital. Believing that this was the case, I asked him to protect my life. Never have I known the experiences and sufferings that then followed.

First, unending injections throughout the day and night. Second, because the capacity of my heart to pump oxygen was impaired, in order to breathe I used an oxygen tank from which a rubber tube ran into my nose. This was never disconnected and caused me great discomfort. Third, I had to constantly take medicine day and night, sometimes more than ten pills at a time. Due to this medication my mind was powerlessly overcome with pain every two hours and my memory degenerated. Food lost its taste, I was given only saltless, Indian-style food, had no appetite for more than a month and whatever food I did eat I threw up, and suffered. Some days I could not do my commitments.

My brother, Thubten Tsering, came to see me. I asked him to recite the self-generation of the body mandala and self-entry and listened with great effort. Often, in my mind’s confusion, my speech would become garbled and I would laugh at myself and then become sad. I experienced and understood the confused mind in regards to merely this. It is extremely difficult to maintain control without becoming confused during the stages of death when the four inner elements are being absorbed. It was at this time that I felt the power of my mind degenerating. When I tried to think about different things and ideas, my mind became confused.

These experiences I am relating to you, my pure-pledged spiritual brother. Keep them secret from the hardheaded logicians.

My ability to recite prayers of ordinary words degenerated and after considering what to do I did stabilizing meditation with strong mindfulness and introspection. By the power of this there arose clarity of mind. Within this state I continued stabilizing meditation with great effort, and this was of much benefit, though the enemy of lethargy often overcame my meditation. I was reminded of the time my spiritual brother and I received the oral

transmission, listening to the so-called precepts of the skillful Ensapa tradition at Tsechokling Monastery, from our root guru possessing the three kindnesses.

During this period I received hundreds of letters but was not allowed to read them.

My holy spiritual brother, through reading your series of advices I developed immeasurable joy and happiness in my mind. The strength of my mind increased and my problems lessened and ceased. I will write here in verse the essence of the series of advices of my heart jewel, spiritual brother.

Practice and meditate mind training:

The sole remedy alleviating unwanted sufferings,

The main object of cultivation of truly awe-inspiring retreaters,

The path traveled by the great meditators of the three times.

You need a happy mind, a conscientious mind, an open mind.

Especially you must cultivate the precept of transforming bad circumstances—the experience of unwanted sufferings—into the path.

Take into your heart the sufferings of mother sentient beings

And again and again give away your merit and happiness to them.

Transform the ripening results within the beings and the environment

And unfavorable circumstances into a pathway leading to enlightenment.

Live contemplating just this—mind training.

My heart has found peace through these and other advices of my heart jewel, spiritual brother. I request you, Venerable Jampa Wangdu, to be my Dharma friend all my life.

In order that my three doors may never be separated from the holy path, I will ever hold fast to the greatness of mind training. The five degenerations are flourishing and the dharmas of hearing, thinking, and meditating have become the causes of ignorance, hatred and attachment to this life. It is very rare to make these leisure and endowments meaningful through the practice of the five powers, the essence of all dharmas. We two and all mother sentient beings, although desiring happiness, are confused about the means of finding it and thus are continually tortured by the three sufferings. Seeing this, may we generate the realization of the equality of self and others.

It has been forty-one days since I became ill. The condition of my body is such that I have become the lord of a cemetery; my mind is like that of an anti-god and my speech like that of an old, mad dog. I still take sixteen pills a day and must depend upon others for moving about and sleeping; and because my hand shakes when I write, read my letter depending on the meanings intended and not upon the mere words written.



*Lama Yeshe, Reno, Nevada, 1977.*

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*May whoever sees, touches, reads, remembers, or talks or thinks about these books never be reborn in unfortunate circumstances, receive only rebirths in situations conducive to the perfect practice of Dharma, meet only perfectly qualified spiritual guides, quickly develop bodhicitta and immediately attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.*

## *LAMA YESHE WISDOM ARCHIVE*

The Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive (LYWA) is the collected works of Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche, its spiritual director, who founded the Archive in 1996. The Lamas began teaching at Kopan Monastery, Nepal, in 1970 and since 1972 their teachings have been recorded and transcribed.

The work of the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive falls into two categories: *archiving* and *dissemination*.

*Archiving* requires managing the collection of recordings of teachings and images of Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche and collecting recordings of Rinpoche's on-going teachings, talks, advice and so forth as he travels the world for the benefit of all. We organize transcription of these recordings and make transcripts available to the general public.

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#### ***The Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition***

The Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT) is an international organization of Buddhist meditation study and retreat centers, monasteries, publishing houses, healing centers and other related activities founded in 1975 by Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche. At present, there are more than 160 FPMT centers, projects and services in over forty countries worldwide.

The FPMT website offers details about the FPMT's many educational programs, a complete listing of FPMT centers located all over the world and a link to the FPMT Store. Please visit [www.fpmt.org](http://www.fpmt.org)

FPMT's Online Learning Center makes FPMT education programs and materials even more accessible to students worldwide. Learn more at [onlinelearning.fpmt.org](http://onlinelearning.fpmt.org).

Wisdom Publications was founded by Lama Yeshe and publishes many books by Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche. Explore their catalog at [www.wisdompubs.org/catalog](http://www.wisdompubs.org/catalog)

## *What to do with Dharma teachings*

The Buddhadharma is the true source of happiness for all sentient beings. Books like this show you how to put the teachings into practice and integrate them into your life, whereby you get the happiness you seek. Therefore, anything containing Dharma teachings, the names of your teachers or holy images is more precious than other material objects and should be treated with respect. To avoid creating the karma of not meeting the Dharma again in future lives, please do not put books (or other holy objects) on the floor or underneath other stuff, step over or sit upon them, or use them for mundane purposes such as propping up wobbly chairs or tables. They should be kept in a clean, high place, separate from worldly writings, and wrapped in cloth when being carried around. These are but a few considerations.

Should you need to get rid of Dharma materials, they should not be thrown in the rubbish but burned in a special way. Briefly: do not incinerate such materials with other trash, but alone, and as they burn, recite the mantra om ah hum. As the smoke rises, visualize that it pervades all of space, carrying the essence of the Dharma to all sentient beings in the six samsaric realms, purifying their minds, alleviating their suffering, and bringing them all happiness, up to and including enlightenment. Some people might find this practice a bit unusual, but it is given according to tradition. Thank you very much.

## *Dedication*

Through the merit created by preparing, reading, thinking about and sharing this book with others, may all teachers of the Dharma live long and healthy lives, may the Dharma spread throughout the infinite reaches of space, and may all sentient beings quickly attain enlightenment.

In whichever realm, country, area or place this book may be, may there be no war, drought, famine, disease, injury, disharmony or unhappiness, may there be only great prosperity, may everything needed be easily obtained, and may all be guided by only perfectly qualified Dharma teachers, enjoy the happiness of Dharma, have love and compassion for all sentient beings, and only benefit and never harm each other.



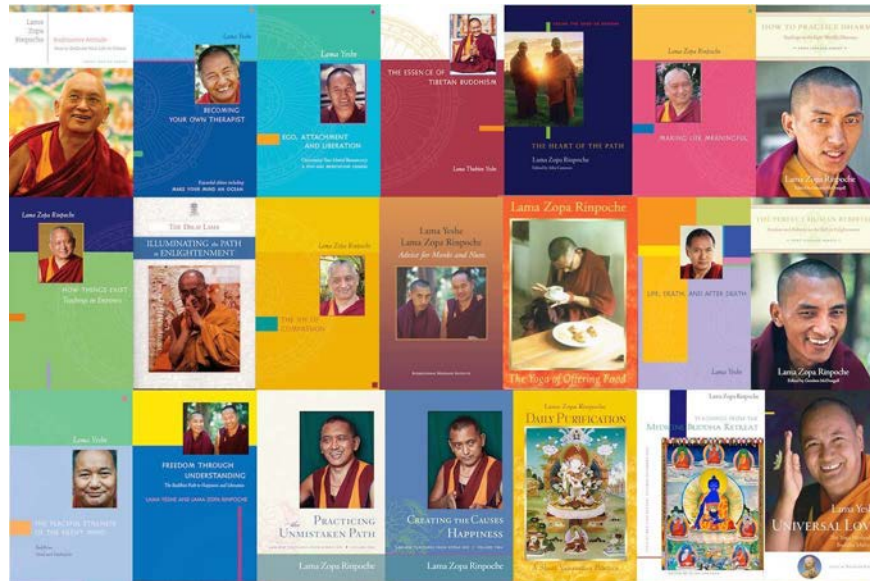
## *Lama Yeshe*

Lama Thubten Yeshe was born in Tibet in 1935. At the age of six, he entered the great Sera Monastic University, Lhasa, where he studied until 1959, when the Chinese invasion of Tibet forced him into exile in India. Lama Yeshe continued to study and meditate in India until 1967, when, with his chief disciple, Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche, he went to Nepal. Two years later he established Kopan Monastery, near Kathmandu, in order to teach Buddhism to Westerners. In 1974, the Lamas began making annual teaching tours to the West, and as a result of these travels a worldwide network of Buddhist teaching and meditation centers—the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT)—began to develop. In 1984, after an intense decade of imparting a wide variety of incredible teachings and establishing one FPMT activity after another, at the age of forty-nine, Lama Yeshe passed away. He was reborn as Ösel Hita Torres in Spain in 1985 and recognized as the incarnation of Lama Yeshe by His Holiness the Dalai Lama in 1986. Lama's remarkable story is told in Vicki Mackenzie's book, *Reincarnation: The Boy Lama* (Wisdom Publications, 1996) and Adele Hulse's official biography, *Big Love*, (forthcoming from LYWA).

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